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303.2    JESUS  
L5    Then and Now

by  
WILLIAM LILLIE

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## 1

## *Can We Know Jesus?*

THE four accounts that we have in the New Testament of Jesus of Nazareth are, as we are being frequently told to-day, neither biographies nor histories, but Gospels—good news proclaimed by the heralds of the Christian faith in the latter half of the first century of our era. This is certainly a true statement, but it is a misleading statement if it makes us suppose that “good news” has nothing at all in common with history and biography. There is one thing that these three forms of literature must have in common if they are to win acceptance—they must be true. News that is false is not really news at all, still less “good news” or Gospel. We must admit that the archaic English of the version of the Gospel which is in most common use among us sometimes gives the impression of an old-time romance or an imaginative chronicle like Malory’s *Morte d’Arthur*. It is not so with the Greek of the original Gospels; as a recent translator remarks, “they have a starkness, an urgency, and a reality which in our English version are slightly blurred”;<sup>1</sup> no one can doubt that their writers believed that they were recording plain historical facts. God, of course, can and does reveal himself to men in other ways than through historical facts, and we believe that he has done this, at least in some measure, at other times and places, through, for example, the mystical experiences of the ancient Hindu sages, or the pictorial symbols of Jewish mythology as we find them in the early chapters of Genesis or Revelation. The men, however, who proclaimed the good news in the early Church, and those who wrote it down in the four Gospels, thought of themselves and their informants as witnesses—people who give

<sup>1</sup> E. V. Rieu, *The Four Gospels—a New Translation* (London 1952), p. x.

evidence about matters of fact. This had been their commission from the risen Lord: "You shall be my witnesses . . . to the end of the earth" (Acts 1.8). In the early preaching recorded in Acts, the apostles spoke of themselves as witnesses, primarily of the Resurrection, but also of the whole life and ministry of Jesus: "We are witnesses to these things" (Acts 5.32; cf., Acts 10.36-43). Luke is at pains to state that the materials from which his Gospel was made "were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were *eyewitnesses* and ministers of the word" (Luke 1.2), and John gives more than once a solemn attestation of the reliability of the eyewitness whose evidence he is narrating; about the piercing of our Lord's side on the Cross, he declares: "He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth" (John 19.35; cf., 21.24). It is to historical events happening in public for all to see that the Gospel writers for the most part bear witness.

There are, of course, in all records of historical events minor inaccuracies and inconsistencies; this is notoriously the case with eyewitness accounts of the well-documented battle of Waterloo, and generals and statesmen of the highest integrity differ in their published memories of minor happenings during the Second World War. The serious student does not feel too much concern about such minor discrepancies; an over-exact correspondence in different accounts of the same event would point to collusion among the witnesses. We, for example, need not be worried that Matthew and Acts have rather different stories as to how the field of blood was acquired from Judas's thirty pieces of silver (Matt. 27.3-10; Acts 1.18,19). There are limits, however, to the amount of error that reasonable men will discount. If a biographical or historical record has inaccurate and misleading statements on every other page the reader is bound to feel sceptical about the central facts of the story. When plain men without any background of constructive New Testament scholarship are told, as they sometimes are, that many of the recorded sayings of Jesus are not genuine, and that many of the reported events of his life and ministry have been given an un-authentic slant by the use made of them in the later Church, they can well be forgiven for doubting whether the New

Testament really contains good news at all, in any common understanding of that expression. It is to those who share this doubt that the rest of this chapter is primarily addressed.

The Christian teacher who attempts to give to-day an historical portrait of Jesus as part of his proclamation of the Gospel is indeed making certain assumptions which require to be defended, because each of them has been denied in our time by competent New Testament scholars and theologians. Three such assumptions we examine now.

1. *We assume that those who wrote or edited the Gospels in their present form were in a position to give a reliable historical portrait of the Jesus who had lived half a century before.* We are often told (without any very convincing reasons being given) that the Christians of the latter half of the first century were not interested in historical facts or in portraits of Jesus "after the flesh". "The primitive Christian mind, as Dibelius shows, had no interest in the deeds and words of Jesus, which was not also an interest in the salvation which he brought to men."<sup>2</sup> Even if we were to accept this somewhat dogmatic assertion, we could still maintain that the deeds and words of Jesus recorded in the four Gospels are directly or indirectly relevant to the salvation which Christ brought, and that, in order to be relevant, the record of them had to be substantially true.

The Christians of that time, however, had in all probability other interests than in what the historical Jesus had already accomplished through his life and death and resurrection, for example, in Jesus as their living present Lord, and in the expectation of his early return. When they thought of him thus, they could portray him in the traditional language of poetry and mythology, which is very different from the plain straightforward words in which the Gospel writers describe the historical Jesus. In Revelation he is "one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden girdle round his breast; his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters; in his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth

\* W. Manson, *Jesus the Messiah* (London 1943), p. 94.

issued a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength" (Rev. 1.13-16). No one could mistake that for a historical portrait.

There were, again, then as now, theologically minded people—and St Paul was one of them—who were more interested in the significance of what Jesus had accomplished through his birth, death, and resurrection than in his life and character, although these too do have their own subordinate place in Pauline teaching (e.g. 1 Cor. 11.23-6; Gal. 6.2). Yet, without neglecting these other and weightier interests, the devout Christian of the second and third Christian generations, being human, must have longed to know more of the details of the earthly life and teaching of Jesus, the One, "whom, having not seen, ye love" (1 Pet. 1.8, A.V.). The most convincing proof that this was the case is just the fact that at this very time some Christians felt constrained to write down the traditional sayings and stories of Jesus in the books that we call the Gospels. They would not have done so, if there had been no demand for such details.

When stories and sayings had been handed down for more than thirty years almost entirely, as seems likely, by word of mouth, it would not be surprising if the devout sometimes exaggerated a statement to make it more striking, or if a story or saying became coloured by the use that preachers or exorcists made of it. There were many things, however, to counteract in some measure these and other natural human tendencies to falsification. If Christ himself and the early apostles followed what was probably at that time (and certainly later) the practice of Jewish rabbis with their oral traditions in making their disciples learn pregnant sayings and even significant anecdotes by heart, the danger of mistakes occurring because of the traditions being passed on orally from one generation to the next becomes considerably less. Such traditions came to be regarded as "holy word", as a Scandinavian scholar has recently called them,<sup>3</sup> and as such were not to be trifled with. The writer of Revelation gives a solemn warning to those who would add to or subtract from such sacred material (Rev. 22.18,19). Again there were at

<sup>3</sup> H. Riesenfeld, *The Gospel Tradition and its Beginnings* (London 1957).

that time critically minded people like the author or editor of Luke, who were sceptical enough to recognize the necessity of evidence from eyewitnesses, and to demand accurate investigation of the facts behind the traditions. A twentieth-century historian could not defend the historicity of his narratives more convincingly than in the way that it is done in the first verses of Luke: "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed" (Luke 1.1-4). According to the second-century bishop Papias, St Peter was the eyewitness on whom Mark relied for at least part of his material, and there is no real reason to doubt the statement of Papias on this matter, however unreliable and uncongenial the Church historian Eusebius may have found him on more theological issues. In any case, if Mark were composed in the sixties of the first century, as most scholars believe, many eyewitnesses would still be alive who could confirm the general accuracy of Mark's account of things that had happened in the years 28 and 29 of our era.

We do not need to suppose with some scholars that these eyewitnesses must have had abnormally good memories, although even illiterate people in the East are often superior in this respect to those of us in the West, who have come to rely more on the written word than on our own recollections. The present writer spent only a single evening in the company of the late Sir Patrick Geddes, perhaps the last of those legendary Scottish professors who were equally proficient in many branches of learning. That was more than forty years ago, but I still retain a very vivid impression of the great man's appearance and personality, and even remember some of his gnomic wisdom-sayings, as a Biblical scholar might call them. How much more likely it is that Jesus of Nazareth made an indelible impression! During the months that some of the disciples were with Jesus, they must have heard the same teaching again and again, for it is unreasonable

to suppose that an itinerant preacher would not repeat his teaching in different places, and they could never forget it. Even those who regard the discourses in John's Gospel as the interpretative constructions of the later Church must admit that they demonstrate that at the time John was written Christians believed that the Holy Spirit was recalling to their memories things that Jesus had actually said to them (John 14.25), and that the Spirit was bearing witness to Jesus in and through the apostles' own witness, which they could give because they had been with Jesus from the beginning (John 15.26,27). There may have been in that witness a sublime indifference about irrelevant details, but there was beyond question an inspired integrity in the testimony they bore to the Jesus whom they had seen and known. If we are right in our modern attempts to distinguish the various traditions that went to the making of the Gospels, one thing stands out clearly; it is to one and the same person exercising the same kind of service to his fellows and to his God that all the varying traditions bear witness. Barth writes of "the unmistakable unity of the picture which they (i.e. the four Gospels) drew of the totality of the activity of Jesus",<sup>4</sup> and this unity of portraiture is one very strong piece of evidence for the general historical reliability of these Gospels.

In most of the attempts made during the last hundred years to portray the historical Jesus, the evidence of the Fourth Gospel has either been ignored altogether or treated as secondary. While it is apparent that its author put the words of Jesus (and of other speakers in his story, like John the Baptist) into his own idiom, and sometimes narrates his facts in the light of a very distinctive interpretation, yet there is no reason to doubt that he too had access to very reliable information. Aramaic turns of phrase like the unnecessary personal pronoun inserted in a relative clause (e.g. John 1.27,33, etc.), an acquaintance with such sites as Bethesda (John 5.2) and Gabbatha (John 19.13) which must have disappeared completely in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, and a dating of the Crucifixion on the day before the official Passover (a dating more likely on several grounds than that suggested by Mark) are among our many indications that

<sup>4</sup> K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. IV, E.T. (Edinburgh 1958), p. 193.

John is as near the original events as the traditions contained in the other three Gospels. Indeed, as we shall argue more generally later, the fact that John looks on the Jesus of history in full consciousness of his now being the Lord of glory, so far from leading John astray, may have enabled him to see the earthly life of Jesus in a truer perspective than had earlier evangelists. A man who has reached old age may forget many details he once knew about people with whom he associated in his youth, but he has probably now a far truer appreciation of their real worth and character than he had when he was a young man. So it may have been with the aged apostle John, if he indeed was, as tradition holds, the eyewitness on whose recollections the Fourth Gospel is based. What John tells gives depth to, rather than contradicts, the portrait of Jesus which we find in the other Gospels. Mark tells us that the disciples did not understand about the loaves with which the five thousand were fed (Mark 6.52); John gives us an insight into what they did not understand by means of the teaching of Jesus which followed the miracle (John 6.26–59).

There are four heroes of the ancient world who emerge triumphantly from the mists of antiquity as real historical personalities. Two of these, the apostle Paul and the Roman Cicero, have made themselves real to us by their own very revealing letters. For our personal acquaintanceship with Socrates, we have two approaches—the gossiping but reasonably historical *Memorabilia* of Xenophon and the highly artificial dialogues of Plato with their idealized portrait of his master. It may be relevant to our appraisal of John's Gospel to note that the more idealized portrait of Socrates written from the insight of a disciple's faith is probably the truer portrait. In this connection Renan, who had the historian's flair for getting to the facts even if he lacked some of the tools of more modern research, held that even the Fourth Gospel was superior as an historical source both to Plato's *Dialogues* and Xenophon's *Memorabilia*.<sup>5</sup> For our fourth hero, Jesus of Nazareth, we have four documents, representing at least five different traditions, written within seventy years of

<sup>5</sup> E. Renan, *The Life of Jesus* (London 1864), p. 20. Translation of *Vie de Jesus*.

the active ministry of Jesus. If our argument here is correct, there is nothing except our reluctance to believe "what is too wonderful to be true" to make us doubt the over-all historical reliability of the portrait given in the Gospels. Our difficulty in presenting this portrait lies not so much in our lack of information as in the fact that everything that characterizes the Christ as a real human person is "so singular, so out of scale in relation to other human persons, so unique and to that extent so alien, that there are no categories in which to grasp it."<sup>6</sup> Jesus was truly a man among men, and yet so very different from all other men.

2. *Our second and more theological assumption is that a knowledge of the Jesus of history is relevant for the faith of Christian believers.* Those who deny this seek Scriptural support for their denial in the Authorized Version rendering of 2 Cor. 5.16, "though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more". The Greek words translated "after the flesh" follow the verb "know" in the original Greek, and are certainly to be taken with it, and not with the noun "Christ" as they appear to be in the translation just quoted. St Paul is referring not to a meeting with Jesus during his life on earth (which it is unlikely that Paul ever had), but to the false picture he had had of the Jesus of history before his conversion, for example, in regarding Jesus' death merely as the shameful but deserved fate of a blasphemer. Many of our own contemporaries have a similarly one-sided picture of Jesus, if we can judge from such titles as "Jesus the Revolutionary", "Jesus the Heretic", "Jesus the Great Outlaw", or even "Jesus the Great Physician". St Paul came to have a truer appraisal of Jesus as the One in whom God was reconciling the world to himself. The Revised Standard Version gives the correct meaning of 2 Cor. 5.16, "Even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer".

It cannot be questioned that our Christian faith is basically concerned with what God did in Christ in the mighty acts of his being born among men, his death on the Cross "for us men and our salvation", his rising again from the dead and exaltation to the Father's presence, and his bestowing of the Holy Spirit on

<sup>6</sup> K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, E.T., Vol. IV ,p. 165.

his Church. These are undoubtedly happenings to which the first apostles bore witness in their preaching—what modern theologians like to call their *kerygma* or proclamation. The Gospel writers themselves bear witness to the centrality of these happenings by the large space they give in their narratives to the Passion and Resurrection, and to Jesus' own predictions of them. St Paul, as we have seen, has almost nothing to say in his letters about the earthly life of Jesus other than about his birth, death, and resurrection. Modern theologians are not wrong in their emphasis on these things, especially on the Cross and the Resurrection. What they apparently fail at times to recognize is that God was reconciling the world to himself not only in the mighty acts we have mentioned but also in the daily life and teaching of Jesus, in his works of compassion and in his words of judgement. Jesus is reported as inviting his disciples to "take up his cross daily and follow" him, and there is a sense in which this is just what he himself did all through his earthly life in carrying out a ministry of reconciliation which found its supreme and completely effective accomplishment on the Cross. Again they apparently fail to recognize the importance of the fact that it was the Jesus of history, and none other, who died on the Cross and rose again. It would certainly not have been the Christian revelation as we know it, if it had been one of the two thieves—even the penitent thief—who, in God's inscrutable purpose, had died on the Cross for our salvation and had been raised by God on the third day. To suppose that this could have been the case would reduce the Atonement to a mechanical transaction—a surprising piece of magic perhaps, but one that to our human understanding at least would have had almost no spiritual significance.

Without denying even for a moment the centrality of those events on which Christian faith has concentrated, is it not possible to include among the objects of that faith the human life and personality of Jesus? One way of regarding faith—and it has clear antecedents in Old Testament language and thought—is as our proper human response to the faithfulness of God. This faithfulness of God stands "publicly portrayed" not only in the death of Christ on the Cross (about which St Paul uses this

expression in Gal. 3.1), but also in the whole personality of Jesus as revealed in both word and action throughout the entire Gospel story. Christ's declaration, "He who has seen me, has seen the Father" (John 14.9), is supremely true of Christ lifted up on the Cross, but it is also true of all that he did and all that he was before the Crucifixion. He was revealing God's faithfulness, as "he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil" (Acts 10.38). We can, for example, see the faithfulness of God, as a challenge to our faith, in Christ's washing of his disciples' feet, just as we can see it later in his death on the Cross, of which the foot-washing was a strange anticipation (John 13.3-8). I cannot but think that St Peter had a real, if flickering, faith in Christ, when he made his great confession at Caesarea Philippi, although he obviously had at that time no anticipation of the Cross or understanding of what it would mean (Mark 8.32,33). When Peter named Jesus the Messiah, he knew that he was facing the kind of person in whom he could whole-heartedly trust. Some of us, as we look back, can equally see how a faith in Jesus and love to him had their beginnings in our own hearts, as we learned in childhood the stories of his earthly ministry, even although at that time we had naturally very little understanding indeed of what the Cross meant to him and to us.

The imitation of Christ has always been recognized as one aspect of Christian living. Jesus himself repeatedly told his disciples to follow him, and this following of Christ probably implies a deliberate commitment to copy Christ as well as loyal obedience to his commands. About the foot-washing, Jesus said explicitly: "I have given you an example that you also should do as I have done to you." (John 13.15.) St Paul could be referring only to ordinary human experiences when he tells his Corinthian readers to be imitators of himself, as he is of Christ (1 Cor. 11.1). St Peter also exhorts his readers to follow Christ's example of patient submission under trial and persecution (1 Peter 2.21-3).

Christ's example must not, however, be limited to his conduct during his ministry and his facing of death any more than the object of Christian faith is to be limited to the historical Jesus. It is in the self-emptying in which God became man that Christ is

supremely our example, but even this example of supreme self-denial is illustrated and made relevant for us in various incidents of the life and ministry of Jesus, for example, his refusal to make stones into bread for his own satisfaction (Matt. 4.2-4), or his exhorting of those whom he healed not to make his miracles public (Mark 1.44). Christian ethics would certainly lose one of its recognized foundations, if it were impossible, as some scholars allege, to know anything of the earthly life of Jesus.

3. *Our third assumption, and it follows directly from the second, is that it is the business of the twentieth-century preacher not only to proclaim what God has done for us in Christ, but also to preach Jesus, in the sense of portraying the life and personality of the Jesus of history.* There is reason to think that this was the practice of the apostles in their preaching. Luke certainly represents Peter as "preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all)", but one part of this same sermon tells "how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses to all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem" (Acts 10.36-9). There are hints elsewhere that there were these two sides to the Gospel message. At Athens St Paul "preached Jesus and the resurrection"—presumably what Jesus is, as well as what God has done through him (Acts 17.18). Again he wrote to the Corinthians, "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified"—the person as well as the work of Jesus (1 Cor. 2.2). Yet, chiefly under the influence of the same St Paul, reinforced in our own day by those who say that we can know little or nothing of the historical Jesus, preachers and evangelists have been in danger of limiting their message to the proclamation of what we have called the mighty acts of God in Christ (the Incarnation, the Atonement, the Resurrection, and the sending of the Holy Spirit), with the result that Christian faith appears in their sermons to be not faith in a personal God or a personal Saviour but faith in an almost mechanical operation of salvation. The result can only be that man's whole relationship to God and Christ becomes depersonalized as if it were fit matter for some celestial electronic computer. The Easter faith

is not faith in a legal transaction, although St Paul and Calvin both sometimes spoke of it in ways that might lead in less imaginative minds to this misunderstanding, and a legal transaction seems all that is left to the plain man's understanding after Bultmann and his followers have completed their tasks of historical criticism and demythologizing. The Christian faith is in Jesus Christ, who lived and died as a man, and who, through what happened at Easter, is now alive for evermore.

The aim of all preaching is that the hearers should meet Jesus in the word preached and this should be a personal encounter. So it is as a person, one who can enter into personal relationships with men as he did during his life on earth, that Jesus is to be preached. Those who hold that we owe the preservation of the stories and sayings of Jesus to the use that preachers made of them in the period before the Gospels were written, are incidentally corroborating our contention that part of the apostolic preaching was intended to show what kind of a man Jesus was during his life on earth. He is still the same kind of person, although now he is Lord of all. From the beginning there has been another safeguard against the danger of reducing the Gospel message to a mechanical scheme of salvation, comprehensible to the human intellect. Jesus comes to men not only in the preaching of the word, but also in the bread and wine of the sacrament. The mystery of what God has done for man needs more to reveal it than even the clearest and most demythologized sermon can provide.

Of course, as we are bound to repeat, the proclamation of the reconciling work of God in Christ must always be at the very heart of Christian preaching. In the heyday of modern liberalism, a preaching that tended to limit itself to the human characteristics of Jesus often degenerated into mere sentimentalism. The Jesus of history is infinitely greater than a "hero strong and tender", about whom adolescents may become starry-eyed. Yet there is a corresponding danger in the other direction. If we, in fear of those psychologizing and romanticizing tendencies which are so conspicuously absent from the four New Testament Gospels, leave out altogether from our preaching the personality of the human Jesus, it can very easily degenerate into a new

scholasticism or a new legalism, in which Jesus may become an unknown and unknowable  $\times$  playing an essential part in God's plan of salvation as it is revealed in the New Testament. We can never accept such a dehydrated Gospel.

## *“According to the Scriptures”*

MODERN scholars rightly see the New Testament to be cradled in the Old; in Jesus of Nazareth the hopes and aspirations of prophet and psalmist were fulfilled. The question is, however, raised whether it was Jesus himself who saw his message and ministry in this light, or whether it was only at a later period that the apostles realized that the Jesus whom they had known was the Coming One of Old Testament prophecy, and one who corresponded in many different ways to certain Old Testament types. If we distinguish between the use that Jesus himself made of the Old Testament and that made by the Gospel writers and later preachers, there seems to be a greater simplicity and naturalness in Jesus' own references than in those of his later followers. When Jesus used a passage from Isaiah in the synagogue at Nazareth to explain his own mission, there is nothing forced or allegorical in his interpretation or his declaration that “to-day this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing”, and he went on to illustrate the truth that no prophet is acceptable in his own country with simple Old Testament examples (Luke 4.16–30). On the other hand when Matthew says about the exile of the infant Jesus to Egypt, “This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, ‘Out of Egypt have I called my son’” (Matt. 2.15), we in our literal modern fashion are inclined to shrug our shoulders and say that the words of Hosea obviously refer to the thirteenth-century Exodus and not to the adventures of the infant Jesus. Yet this is not as unnatural and unscientific a use of prophecy as we often take it to be. A visitor from another country could well see a similar artificiality in my remarking to a friend who is bemoaning his bad luck, “The fault, dear Brutus,

is not in our stars". Might not this visitor imagine that I foolishly supposed that Shakespeare had explicitly predicted my friend's self-deception or even that I was suffering from the delusion that my friend was the Roman Brutus? Again it is possible, although by no means established, that the Gospel writers may have deliberately set themselves to copy Old Testament models; the five discourses in Matthew may be a deliberate reflection of the five books of the Law or of the five books of Psalms, and Luke may have had in his mind the pattern of Deuteronomy, as a scholar has recently urged.<sup>1</sup> It seems remarkable that at a time when many Christians reacted strongly against the Judaism of their own time, the Christian writers still saw their Lord and Master as the One who really fulfilled the Old Testament tradition, and even used the methods of Jewish exegesis to demonstrate this. The most reasonable explanation of this, which is amply confirmed by what most scholars accept as genuine sayings of Jesus, is that Jesus had thought of himself and spoken of himself in his teaching in this way.

The Gospel writers, even apart from those places where they explicitly call attention to the fulfilment of prophecy, show by many incidental references and echoes of language what a large part the Old Testament played in the life and ministry of Jesus. The fact that he was invited to read in the synagogue at Nazareth on a visit there indicates that he had learned to read the Hebrew Bible in his childhood, probably in part, at least, by the traditional Oriental method of learning large portions of it by heart. The questions that he asked the doctors in the Temple, when he was twelve years old, would in all likelihood be questions about Old Testament teachings. He responded to the temptations that faced him in the desert at the beginning of his ministry by recalling words from the Old Testament, and the fact that this happened three times suggests that it was his customary way of reacting to temptation. In his teachings he used Old Testament illustrations, and saw in the actions of Old Testament heroes, such as Moses the law-giver (Matt. 5.21), David the king (Mark 2.23-8), and Jonah the prophet (Matt. 12.40), precedents

<sup>1</sup> C. F. Evans, *The Central Section of St Luke's Gospel in Studies in the Gospels*, ed. D. E. Nineham (Oxford 1955), pp. 37-54.

for his own actions. It is possible that he may have regarded these people as prophetic "types" of himself, although it is likely that the hints of this have been overworked by expounders of both ancient and modern typology. In certain of his actions, most conspicuously in the arrangements he made for his triumphal entry on an ass into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, he appears to have acted deliberately in terms of an Old Testament prophecy. Two of the seven recorded sayings on the Cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" and, "Father into thy hands I commit my spirit", are direct quotations from the Psalms (22.1; 31.5). The vivid hyperbole of Jesus' declaration that he came to fulfil the law and the prophets without the cancellation of a single iota or even an ornamental title (Matt. 5.17,18) is, I am convinced, an Eastern teacher's way of driving home the truth that his whole mission and message were firmly grounded on the Old Testament revelation.

Jesus was not, however, merely absorbed in the language and thought of the Old Testament in the way that many Christians like John Bunyan or John Wesley have been in the language and thought of the Bible as a whole. He saw himself as the fulfilment not only of particular prophecies, but, with a characteristic width of outlook, of all the highest aspirations of Old Testament religion. He began his mission in Galilee with the announcement that "the time is fulfilled" (Mark 1.15), and this time must have embraced the day of the Lord and other Old Testament anticipations. In his own village of Nazareth, he declared quite simply, as we have seen, that one of the most wonderful of Old Testament prophecies was being fulfilled by his presence among them. Many prophets and righteous men, he said, had longed to see and hear what the Galileans of Jesus' time were having the opportunity of seeing and hearing (Matt. 13.17). He was the culmination of the whole revelation, and he did not hesitate to say so. Modern scholars have tried to analyse this fulfilment chiefly in terms of three Old Testament conceptions of the Coming One which Christians soon regarded as peculiarly applicable to Jesus of Nazareth. These conceptions are indicated by the titles, Messiah or Christ, Son of man and Servant of Yahweh or, more familiarly, Servant of the Lord. There has

been much argument among scholars as to whether Jesus ever used these titles of himself, and it has been suggested that the Gospel writers' use of the phrase "the Son of man" on the lips of Jesus, and John's use of the word "Messiah", are anachronistic usages of phrases that were characteristic of Christian speech in the writers' own times. We shall suggest later that in his determination to do his Father's will and that alone, Jesus was reluctant to accept any title or classificatory label that might appear to limit the range of his obedience. He even objected to being labelled "good" (Mark 10.18) and was apparently critical of those who saw his messiahship only in terms of his descent from David (Mark 12.35-7) or of his having been born in Bethlehem (John 7.41,42).

However we explain the fact, Jesus was certainly unwilling to use for himself the title Messiah or Christ. In Mark, where this word occurs only seven times, there is only a single rather doubtful case (Mark 9.41), where Jesus may be directly referring to himself. We can guess that Jesus avoided using this title because for the majority of his hearers it implied a reference to something that Jesus certainly was not—one who would deliver the Jewish people from Roman domination by force of arms. This was the kind of Messiah the Galilean crowd had probably in mind, when they tried to make Jesus a king by force (John 6.15) and that Herod Antipas wanted to kill (Luke 13.31). If, however, the Jews of our Lord's time gave a wrong meaning to the word "Christ", we almost certainly make the almost opposite mistake and do not think of Christ as a king at all. The primary meaning of Messiah was "anointed king" (or perhaps, rarely, "anointed priest"), so that it was quite natural for the Second Isaiah to refer to the heathen ruler Cyrus as God's Messiah (Isaiah 45.1)—an attribution that is startling to us who know only one Messiah, Jesus Christ.

The point we wish to make here is that even if the word "Messiah" were never on the lips of Jesus, the equivalent notion of kingship frequently was. The Gospel narratives suggest that the most frequent subject about which Jesus taught was the Kingdom of God; Matthew called it the "Kingdom of Heaven", wishing in Jewish fashion to avoid using the Divine name.

Jesus certainly taught that the coming of this kingdom was bound up with his own ministry and person (Mark 1.15; Luke 11.20), although scholars are still in disagreement as to the exact nature of the relationship. In these circumstances we need not doubt that on two critical occasions Jesus accepted this title as his own. At Caesarea Philippi he expressed obvious joy that St Peter had recognized his messiahship at a time when most people thought of him in different fashion (Matt. 16.13-17). Before the second occasion Jesus had already shown himself to be the Messiah predicted in Old Testament prophecy by the mode of his entry to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (Zech. 9.9), and possibly by his cleansing of the temple court (Mal. 3.1-4). Then, in response to the High Priest's challenge at his trial before the Sanhedrin, he publicly and deliberately accepted the title, giving it supernatural implications which his questioner had not anticipated (Mark 14.61,62). If we are to regard the phrase "Son of God" as a title rather than as a conventional description in Greek of a great and good man, it is probably a messianic title. It had been used of earthly kings in Old Testament times (2 Sam. 7.14), and it occurred in a Psalm that was commonly regarded as messianic. "You are my son, to-day I have begotten you" (Ps. 2.7) are the words echoed in the voice heard by Jesus at his baptism and later at his transfiguration. As we shall see later, Christ's sonship meant to him a great deal more than a claim to be the Messiah, although it almost certainly included such a claim. What really concerned Jesus was not the fact that he was the Messiah—of that I believe he had no doubt after the experience of his baptism—but the kind of Messiah that God wished him to be, and how to carry out that purpose in his life and teaching. The result was that he completely transformed the Jewish idea of the Messiah, so that the Christ of our Christian faith seems to be an entirely different kind of person from the Messiah of Jewish expectation.

Our difficulty with regard to the title "Son of man" is of a very different kind. Unless we are prepared to deny a reasonable historical reliability to all the various traditional sources of the Gospels, we must believe that Jesus commonly referred to himself by this title. This belief is confirmed by the fact that the

writers of the New Testament never use it otherwise than on the lips of Jesus, except on one single occasion, when St Stephen's words are closely parallel to one of Jesus' own sayings (Acts 7.56; cf. Mark 14.62). If this were, as some allege, a title given to Jesus by his followers after the Resurrection, it would be a very strange accident that it does not appear in a single one of the doctrinal epistles, most of which were written either earlier than, or at the same period as, the Gospels. It may be that the writers of the epistles avoided it because they knew that they did not understand its depth of meaning. For our difficulty here is to know exactly what our Lord intended by this phrase. Its meaning in Semitic idiom generally, and apparently in almost every Old Testament example of its use, would simply be "human being"; it might even have overtones of human inferiority as in the question of the eighth Psalm, "What is man that thou art mindful of him and the son of man that thou dost care for him?". In Ezekiel it is the regular mode in which God addresses the prophet, in a fashion very close to our modern colloquial use of the word "son" in addressing a younger man.

The one possible exception is found in Daniel 7.13, where "with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man" before the Ancient of Days in order to receive an everlasting kingdom. Even here some commentators find the total significance of the phrase in its indicating that the promised kingdom is as different from the great world empires of the Near East as human being is from animal monster. But human beings do not come with the clouds of heaven, and most scholars believe that it is a mythical and supernatural figure which represents "the people of the saints of the Most High" in Daniel's vision. Our Lord is reported by Mark as on two occasions having spoken of the Son of man as coming in or with the clouds of heaven, and it may be more than a coincidence that in the stories of our Lord's transfiguration and ascension (Mark 9.7; Acts 1.9)—both occasions on which Jesus appears as a supernatural figure—there is a reference to clouds. The title is somewhat similarly used in Jewish apocalyptic writings (Enoch 46.8; 4 Esdras 13.3, 51f.) of a heavenly being who exercises the messianic function of judging the world. So we may infer that on the two occasions Jesus used

the words "the Son of man" in connection with the clouds of heaven, and probably on others, so far from emphasizing his ordinary humanity, he was rather giving hints of his supernatural origin and of his coming again as judge. Yet Jesus also uses it very frequently in speaking of his impending sufferings, as if his right to such a title were only to be established by his accepting the way of the Cross (e.g. Mark 8.31; 9.31; 10.33). Jesus' way of using this expression reminds us of the truth that, however much we regard Jesus as a human figure (and this was probably the first inference that Aramaic speaking hearers would subconsciously make from it), there was in this Son of man, as he is portrayed in the Gospels, a mysterious element, something that he himself could suggest only by using a title from the apocalyptic mythology of his contemporaries.

So far as we are told, Jesus only on one single occasion spoke of one of the Servant Songs of Isaiah as referring to himself. On the night of his arrest, he warned his disciples of their danger with the words, "For I tell you that this scripture must be fulfilled in me, 'And he was reckoned with the transgressors'; for what is written about me has its fulfilment" (Luke 22.37)—where the reference is clearly to Isaiah 53.12. Yet of all the Old Testament figures that of the Servant of Yahweh seems to be the one that Jesus may have deliberately chosen as a pattern for his own life and ministry. In his humility (Isa. 42.2), in his patient acceptance of wrongs done to him (Isa. 50.6), in his steadfastness under discouragement (Isa. 42.4), and in his perfect reliance on God's faithfulness (Isa. 49.4), the Servant of Yahweh is the fitting type of what Jesus proved to be, even apart from the suffering on behalf of others, the atoning death, and the renewed life, of which there are striking anticipations in Isaiah 53. There is no other figure in the Old Testament who embodies the principle of non-resistance to evil which is at the same time Jesus' most original contribution to ethical thinking and the greatest scandal he has given to humanistic realism. The voice which Jesus heard at his baptism appears to echo one of the Servant Songs, "My chosen in whom my soul delights" (Isa. 42.1), as well as the Messianic Psalm, mentioned on p. 18. This may indeed have been the moment when Jesus realized that his own vocation was that

of the Servant of Yahveh, although there can be no proof of this. In one of his most pregnant sayings, "For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10.45), Jesus describes his own ministry in terms of service and giving up his own life exactly in the fashion of Isaiah 53. When the risen Christ interpreted to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus "in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself", in order to demonstrate that it was necessary "that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory" (Luke 24.26,27), Isaiah 53 was obviously the passage that he was chiefly using. Philip the Evangelist is explicitly said to have done so in proclaiming the same truth to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8.32-5), and St Paul must have had the same passage in mind when he wrote that "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures" (1 Cor. 15.3). Even Jesus' cry of dereliction on the Cross came from a Psalm (22), which many regard as a psalm of the Suffering Servant. It gives a new significance and congruity to the whole story of Jesus' ministry from his baptism to his crucifixion when we assume that Jesus saw in the Servant of Yahveh the pattern of the Father's will for himself. The Jewish rabbis do not appear ever to have regarded the Messiah as one who would suffer in the way that the Servant Songs had described, but even in New Testament times, the early Church found in Jesus the fulfilment of these prophecies of Isaiah of Babylon (e.g. 1 Pet. 2.24), and it is reasonable to think that this identification was first made by Jesus himself.

There are two dangers to be avoided in our right emphasis on the part that the Old Testament heritage played in the life and work of Jesus. We may be tempted to take one single aspect of this heritage and make so much of it that we exclude the other aspects. Thus we may see in Jesus only an apocalyptic visionary as Schweitzer tended to do, or a very enlightened rabbi, even a Pharisee, as certain Jewish biographers of Jesus have done, or an unusual Essene, as some careless students of the Dead Sea Scrolls are beginning to do. It is indeed likely that parts of the Old Testament heritage came to Jesus by way of the active religious groups of his own time, that he shared the Pharisees' outlook on the reality of the Resurrection (Mark 12.26,27), that he used

the language of the more apocalyptic Jewish writings of his time (as in Mark 13), and that he learned from the language of the Essenes to see the struggle of good and evil in terms of light and darkness (John 8.12; cf. Matt. 6.22,23). The fact that these things were part of the current topics for discussion amongst religious groups at the time should make us look at them with a critical eye before accepting them as an essential part of Jesus' own message. The details, for example, of celestial geography in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16.19-30) are not to be taken as Gospel truth; they belong to a conventional Jewish picture of heaven and hell. We should think rather of Jesus as taking much of his religious inheritance directly from the Old Testament itself, for Jesus' own way of dealing with the Old Testament shows a wholeness of outlook, a common-sense sanity, and a genuine open-ness to the future that are to be found in no other Jew, not even in St Paul, and certainly not in the contemporary groups we have mentioned. Our other danger lies in assuming too readily, as some of the contributors to our modern theological word-books tend to assume, that the meaning which Jesus gave to a word corresponds more or less exactly to the meaning it had in the Greek version of the Old Testament. The word "faith" in the New Testament has certainly overtones of its Hebrew equivalent, with its suggestions of reliability, faithfulness, and truth, but on the lips of Jesus it came to mean a great deal more. T. R. Glover had a salutary reminder here: "It is always bad criticism to give to the words of genius the value or connotation that they would have on the lips of ordinary people. To a great mind words are charged with a fullness of meaning that little people do not reach."<sup>2</sup> This is substantially true of the words of the Old Testament as they were used by Jesus.

Jesus, again, did not limit himself to the letter of the Old Testament as pious Jews at the time increasingly tended to do. He was more interested in the spirit than in the letter, and, as we shall see later,<sup>3</sup> treated the text of the Old Testament with a freedom in interpretation and application which must have been very shocking to the literalistic pedants of his time. Yet in his

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in H. G. Wood, *Tertot Reaveley Glover* (Cambridge 1953), p. 110.

<sup>3</sup> See pages 44f.

daily living, Jesus was up to a point content to observe the ordinary customs of his people, customs which all Jewish rabbis would consider to be based on the Old Testament revelation. His attitude to them has been described by Barth as that of "passive conservatism".<sup>4</sup> It was his custom on the Sabbath to attend the local synagogue (Luke 4.16), and he often taught there (Mark 1.21). He went to the temple festivals with other pious Jews (John 2.13; 5.1; 7.10, etc.), and even admitted that the tithing of mint and other garden herbs was a real if unimportant duty (Matt. 23.23). Yet whenever such a custom stood in the way of a direct obedience to his Heavenly Father, he was absolutely definite in setting it aside. He was a notorious Sabbath breaker, preferring the health and happiness of his fellow-men to obeying the traditional rules (e.g. Mark 2.23—3.6), and we shall see later how he claimed divine authority in dealing with the rest of the Old Testament legal system. He claimed that there was present in his own ministry something greater than the temple (Matt. 12.6), and he predicted its early destruction, an idea that was blasphemous to most loyal Jews (Mark 13.2; cf. 14.58). The worship of the Father in spirit and in truth which he came to initiate was as independent of the Jerusalem temple as it was of the Samaritan shrine on Mount Gerizim (John 4.20–4). However much Jesus shared in and valued the Old Testament heritage, he never allowed it to stand in the way of a fuller revelation of God and a more direct obedience to him. There were new things as well as old which the scribe, trained for the kingdom of heaven, must bring out of his treasure-house (Matt. 13.52.).

It has become a generally accepted position in modern New Testament studies that, in Barth's phrase, it is "through the prism of Easter" that the Gospel writers see the life of Jesus on earth. "The light of Easter shines on the picture of Jesus given in the Gospels whose writers see that the Lord who walked on earth is one with the risen and living Saviour."<sup>5</sup> Up to a point this is

<sup>4</sup> K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, E.T., Vol. IV, p. 173.

<sup>5</sup> P. Althaus, *The So-called Kerygma and the Historical Jesus* (Edinburgh 1959), p. 22. Translation of *Das sogen-nante Kerygma und der historisch Jesus* (Gutersloh 1958).

certainly true, for no Christian could write of one whom he knew to be risen from the dead, and seated on the right hand of God, as if he were an ordinary man. But the truth is a great deal more complicated than this statement suggests. If, as we have been arguing, Jesus, at least from the time of his baptism, saw his mission in terms of Old Testament aspirations and prophecies, then it is reasonable to believe that he lived his whole life and carried out his whole ministry in anticipation of, and preparation for, what he was to accomplish in his cross and resurrection. One New Testament writer affirms that it was "for the joy that was set before him" that he "endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb. 12.2). It seems impossible to guess with what degree of clarity Jesus foresaw what lay ahead of him, and we shall discuss this in a later chapter.<sup>6</sup> What we contend for here is that the good news of salvation which the apostles proclaimed was not something altogether new, suddenly revealed to them through the experiences of Easter and Pentecost. It was something implicit and constantly finding expression in the earthly ministry of Jesus himself, and one element in Jesus' consciousness of it was that he was fulfilling in his life and work the highest insights of Old Testament religion. The prism of the Resurrection simply brought into focus something that was there all the time.

There are two things more to be said about this prism. It has been too readily assumed that it is an obscuring prism or even a distorting prism hindering us from seeing the historical facts as a historian should see them. The Gospel writers are, it is suggested, transforming the words and works of Jesus, in order to make them suitable words and works for the Lord of glory, much as the medieval biographers of the saints transformed incidents of their ordinary lives into miraculous deeds suitable for saints. The extreme position is that of Bultmann, who apparently finds the prism so opaque that he declares that it "is historically a hopeless and perverse undertaking to attempt to reach the historical Jesus".<sup>7</sup> What we contend is that the prism enables us to see the historical facts in truer perspective. As T. S. Eliot said, "the end is where we start from" in writing a history of Jesus.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See page 75.

<sup>7</sup> P. Althaus, op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>8</sup> T. S. Eliot, *Four Quarters* (London 1944), p. 42.

Our other observation is that it would be equally true to say that the apostles saw what happened at Easter and Pentecost through the prism of the earthly life and teaching of Jesus. The empty tomb was not, as many sceptics have suggested, simply a physical fact which could have been due to trickery or the mistake of a careless observer; it was because it was the grave of the Jesus whom they had known, that it could hold for the apostles the promise of the gift of eternal life. What happened at Pentecost was not merely a series of strange psychical manifestations either of religious enthusiasm or of common drunkenness (as some of the spectators suggested); the heart of it was the disciples' discovery that the Jesus whom they had known had come back to them again in a different fashion. It would not have been the Christian Pentecost if the new power in their hearts had been other than that of the Jesus of history. The impression that is given by St Peter's sermons, as they are summarized in the early chapters of Acts, is that the apostles would never have realized the true meaning of what God was doing at Easter and Pentecost if they had not known the man Jesus. For St Peter begins by using of Jesus words like "man" and "servant" which do not suggest the exalted Lord but goes on to tell how this serving man has now been made both Lord and Christ. It is clear that one of the links which St Peter uses to connect the man Jesus with the glorified Saviour is forged by quotations from the Old Testament (Acts 2.25-8,34,35). There can be no real separation of the historical Jesus from the Christ of the apostolic proclamation, because both are equally and integrally the fulfilment of the promises enshrined in the Old Testament.

## 3

## *“Behold the Man”*

ONE of the dangers of viewing the Jesus of history through the prism of Easter is that we fail to see him as a man—a genuine human being. Carlyle once in a moment of exasperation at the romantic medievalism which regarded Richard Coeur de Lion as “a theatrical popinjay with greaves and steel-cap on it” declared that he was “a man living upon victuals”;<sup>1</sup> Christians need the same kind of reminder about Jesus of Nazareth. Christian heresies, and indeed sometimes Christian orthodoxy, very soon began to use language which suggested that Jesus was essentially a theophany—a god disguised as a man—and that his humanity was merely assumed by him as a mask or garment to cover his fundamental divinity. In the words of one of our best-loved Christian hymns it is “veiled in flesh” that we see the God-head, as if the really important thing about him was his divinity, hidden from us by an unfortunate if necessary covering. It is, I believe, a measure of the reliability of the authors of the four New Testament Gospels that they so largely avoided this deified portrait of Jesus, which is a very natural expression of Christian devotion. In the Gospels, Jesus is for the most part depicted quite simply and directly as a human being, although admittedly rather an unusual one. He increased in wisdom and stature like any other normal boy, and he was obedient to his parents in such a way that he grew in favour with God and man as an obedient lad would. It may be out of the common run of things, but by no means unique, that a boy of twelve should engage in theological discussions with religious teachers, but it is very characteristic of the first stirrings of independent manhood for

<sup>1</sup> T. Carlyle, *Past and Present*, Bk. II, ch. 1, Centenary Edition, p. 44.

such a boy to be separated from his parents during a visit to the big city. He was commonly known as Jesus, son of Joseph (Luke 4.22; John 1.45); an identification as the son of somebody was probably as much a usual part of a Jewish name as a surname is in modern Europe, and must not be taken as evidence against our Lord's being born of a virgin. A single text (Mark 6.3) refers to him as "the carpenter" and suggests that either he worked in his youth in Joseph's shop, or was so closely identified with a family whose traditional occupation was carpentry as to be thus known. Like other men he was sometimes hungry, as after his time of fasting in the desert (Matt. 4.2); he was sometimes thirsty, as at Jacob's well (John 4.7) and on the Cross (John 19.28); he was sometimes weary, again as at Jacob's well (John 4.6); he shrank from anguish and pain, whether physical or spiritual (Luke 22.42). He knew our common human emotions of joy (Luke 10.21), of sorrow (John 10.35), of compassion (Mark 6.34), and of surprise (Matt. 8.10). There are particular references to the emotion of anger (Mark 1.43; John 11.33,38), although we must believe that his anger completely lacked concern with one's own interests, which makes it so often a sinful emotion in other people. We modern people are a little disappointed that there is no mention in the Gospels of our Lord smiling or laughing. But such expressions of emotion were not remarked on favourably in ancient religious literature, and the apostolic witnesses were far more conscious of Jesus' sensitivity to the tears at the heart of things. The accusation that Jesus was "a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners" (Matt. 11.19), even although we know that he was neither glutton nor drunkard, does suggest that he was what we should call a very human person, sociable and understanding. It is significant that those who passed on the Gospel tradition did not suppress this saying with its disparaging suggestion, as they well might have done in pious reverence.

Of his natural limitations as a human being the Gospel narratives say little, but there is no suggestion that they were not there. He, who "took our infirmities and bore our diseases" (Matt. 8.17), may have done so not only by his works of healing but also by himself suffering from some of them, although he

apparently never talked about his own health. The fact that he grew in wisdom indicates that he shared the limitations in knowledge of the men of his time: he was not endowed with a divine insight into the mysteries of science or the problems of philosophy. He spoke, for example, of insane people as having been taken possession of by evil spirits. There is no need to explain this way of talking as being used in a kind of divine condescension to the ignorance of his hearers, including the victims of insanity, who would understand only such language. There is still less reason to suppose that Jesus used it because it gives a sounder account of insanity than does the technical language of modern psychiatry, although this very well may be the case. Jesus spoke thus, because he was a man of his own time, and he understood the troubles of the insane in this first-century way. We need not even suppose that Jesus had an esoteric insight into the mysteries of the unseen world, which have attracted the curiosity of so many religiously-minded people, although generally with little spiritual advantage. As we have seen, when he told a story of heaven and hell in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, he used what is clearly the conventional Jewish picture of life after death (*Luke 16.19-31*) and we must not allegorize it in an attempt to give it divine authority. He himself expressly declared that he did not know the date of the final climax of history (*Mark 13.32*), although that was very much a subject for speculation among the religious thinkers of his time. He differed from them in realizing the uselessness of such speculation, as a Socrates also would have realized it.

What is more surprising is that the Gospels for the most part describe him as taking the same kind of attitude to the Heavenly Father as might be expected of a devout and far-sighted Jew with no claim to deity. He said his prayers, and there is no suggestion that his prayers were addressed to himself as the God-head veiled in flesh. He shared in the public worship of the synagogue and in the festivals of the Jerusalem temple, and however conscious he may have been of formalism and hypocrisy in the current modes of ritual, we may be quite sure that he worshipped the Heavenly Father there in spirit and in truth, as indeed many of his true followers have done under similar

outward limitations. He found opportunities for private prayer, both during his ordinary ministry (Mark 1.35) and at times of special crisis and decision like his baptism (Luke 3.21), his calling of the twelve apostles (Luke 6.12), his challenging question to the disciples at Caesarea Philippi (Luke 9.18), his transfiguration (Luke 9.28,29), and particularly in Gethsemane before his trials and crucifixion (Luke 22.41-4). He taught his disciples to pray by praying with them (Luke 11.1-4). The most striking difference in the prayer that he taught them from other Jewish prayers is the familiarity of the word he used in addressing his Heavenly Father; one would be tempted to translate it "papa" or "daddy" if these words in English had not been cheapened by vulgar misuse. If we can judge from the more intimate teachings of John's Gospel, it was the guiding principle of his life, as it should be of every man's life, to know and carry out the Heavenly Father's will (e.g. John 5.19,20; 5.30; 6.38; 8.28, etc.). Although Jesus does not speak so much about this in the other Gospels, they too make it clear that in the end it was his decision to follow his Father's will rather than his own human inclinations which led to the Cross; his prayer in Gethsemane was the very human prayer, "Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22.42). This prayer shows that it was not always easy for him, any more than for the rest of us, to know and carry out the will of God in his particular circumstances. One New Testament writer was bold enough to say that he "learned obedience through what he suffered" (Heb. 5.8), as if he too like other men came to know God's will for himself better, and to carry it out more obediently, because of life's disciplining.

Yet we cannot but feel that it is just in his relationship to his Heavenly Father that there is a difference between Jesus and the rest of us—a difference in degree so great that it is best described as a difference in kind—although the Gospels are very reticent about it. Jesus did come to know God's will for himself with a definiteness and largeness of vision to which no other man has ever attained, and he had the courage and purpose to carry it out, even when the works that God willed to do through him were what most men would regard as impossible miracles (John

5.20,21). Yet, to the end, this was no easy course for Jesus; the cry on the Cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"—however we may interpret it, and whatever theological implications it may have—is at bottom the cry of the human heart in that most baffling of man's familiar religious experiences, the experience of how hard it is to know the living presence of God. It is not difficult for us to believe that Jesus was human in the sense that he shared the limitations of the physical powers and secular knowledge of other men; it is harder to believe that he was still truly man, when he looked up to God.

There was a quality in our Lord's manhood that, for want of a better name, may be called genuineness, although it had elements of directness, sincerity, and integrity which the adjective "genuine" scarcely conveys. It was a quality diametrically opposite to that characteristic of the Pharisees which caused our Lord to denounce them as hypocrites or play-actors. The Pharisees were not hypocrites, as our modern use of the word suggests, in the sense that they pretended to be religious while they were not really religious at all. To judge from the evidence of the Jewish historian Josephus and the Jewish Talmud, as well as that of St Paul (Phil. 3.5; Acts 26.5), the Pharisees were very much in earnest about their religion, although sometimes falling into such perversions of religion as legalism and ostentation, to which the very religious are prone. What was wrong was that their religion had come to be largely a matter of presenting to the world the "image" of what a pious Jew should be. The great spiritual realities of Old Testament religion—justice, loving-kindness, and truth—did not matter very much to them, so long as the world could see in them what the God-fearing life was in every detail. Jesus was so very different; he was completely unconcerned about presenting an image—something that has become as important to individuals and groups in the modern world as it was to the Pharisees. He was obviously rather indifferent—the Pharisees would have said downright careless—about recognized religious practices, like Sabbath observance (Mark 2.23—3.6), the correct ceremonial washings (Luke 11.38; Mark 7.2—5), the avoidance of bad company (Luke 7.39; 15.2), and the eating of only ceremonially clean foods (Mark 7.18f).

His religion was the spontaneous and genuine expression of his love to his Heavenly Father and his love to his fellow-men, and he had no time for religious rules and conventions directed to the making of a good impression. T. S. Eliot writes thus of the shadow that falls within the life of most men:

Between the idea  
And the reality  
Between the motion  
And the act  
Falls the Shadow.

Between the conception  
And the creation  
Between the emotion  
And the response  
Falls the Shadow.<sup>2</sup>

That shadow was entirely absent from the life of Jesus. Barth puts this strikingly, if somewhat paradoxically, by saying that in our account of Jesus "we must abandon completely the current distinctions between . . . speaking and action, behind which there usually lurk the differentiations of knowledge and life, theory and practice, truth and reality".<sup>3</sup> When Jesus spoke, his words were so much the expression of his whole being that they were more akin to *action* in their power to perform miracles or to compel men to leave all and follow him. When Jesus acted, his deeds, to use a modern phrase, spoke louder than his words, demonstrating the real nature of his message in a way that words never could have done. It is a revelation of the perfect integrity of Christ that in him there was nothing of that gap between speech and action which is characteristic of most men.

This spontaneous genuineness may throw some new light on the fact that has been already mentioned, that Jesus seems to have avoided using of himself the titles and labels which are so dear to the professionally religious (Matt. 23.8-10). He did not

<sup>2</sup> T. S. Eliot, "The Hollow Men", from *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London 1963), pp. 89, 90.

<sup>3</sup> K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, E.T., Vol. IV, p. 194.

use the title Messiah of himself, and apparently forbade others to use it in public, not because he was not yet the Messiah of Jewish expectation (as some have suggested), but because this label would have given people wrong ideas of what he really was; they would have tried to make him an earthly king (John 6.15), and the whole Christian movement might have become a kind of unreal, hypocritical Zealot revolt. His Messiahship lay not in labels or titles, but in genuine obedience to the will of his Heavenly Father, and Jesus was glad when St Peter showed the first signs of recognizing this. It must have been very hard for a first-century Jew to see in a humble teacher from Galilee the promised Messiah. In similar fashion we have seen that Jesus only on one occasion identified himself with the Servant of Yahweh; but he lived out in suffering and service all that this Old Testament conception had really meant. The one title which he apparently did use for himself—"the Son of man" was so ambiguous that scholars are still arguing what it really meant. He may have used it as a challenge to thought rather than as a familiar title. It certainly suggested the genuineness of Jesus' manhood, whether we think of it in terms of human weakness (as the Semitic idiom tends to make us do) or, as is more likely, in terms of the supernatural being of apocalyptic thought, who was still the prototype and ideal of mankind—Man, as it were, with a capital letter. This seems to me to be the small element of truth in the view of those scholars who hold that Jesus never even thought of himself as Messiah or Servant of Yahweh or Son of man, but that these titles were given to him later by Jewish disciples who saw in the risen and glorified Lord the fulfilment of these Old Testament types. What is true is that Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom did not consist in his claiming for himself these titles; it consisted rather in a living demonstration in word and action of what these Old Testament aspirations really meant; God's will may have been revealed to him at least in part through these Old Testament figures. He knew that the Scriptures were being fulfilled in his person, in his words, and in his actions, and he said so quite explicitly to the disciples of John who asked him, "Are you he who is to come?" (Luke 7.19). In his answer he tells them what he has been doing in the

way of miracle in words that echo those of the Old Testament prophet (Isa. 35.5,6), but he ends his account with the words, "And blessed is he, who takes no offence at me" (Luke 7.23). Pharisees were likely to jib at one who so obviously did what the prophets expected of the Coming One without the authority of a recognized title.

There is a kindred aspect of the earthly life of Jesus, to which the French jurist Jacques Ellul has drawn attention.<sup>4</sup> Our modern "style of life" (to use Ellul's phrase) differs from that of Jesus in our obsession with doing things, and our consequent enslavement to the material means by which these things are accomplished. Jesus had little concern with such material means; he apparently had no home of his own—"nowhere to lay his head", as he himself graphically put it (Matt. 8.20)—and his only personal possession of which we have any record was a single seamless garment (John 19.23). The modern man tends to measure the value of a man's life by what he accomplishes in material results—the founding of an institution, the building of a ship, the writing of a book, or even the winning of a championship medal—and the accomplishment of these things demands an ever-increasing amount of tools or capital or means of production, which is just the economist's jargon for material possessions. The summit of folly is reached when we value a man's life not by his quality of living but by his possessions. Jesus said, "A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 12.15), and he himself proved the truth of this saying by his way of life. During his life on earth he founded no elaborate organization, wrote no book, and made no blueprints for a five- or ten-year plan. In the world's eyes he accomplished nothing more than the healing and helping of a few sick and sinful people who would soon be dead anyway, and the getting together of a few friends and disciples, all of whom were to desert him at the moment of crisis, although later they were to come under his power in a new way, and become outstanding witnesses for him. Of course conditions in first-century Palestine were far more simple than in modern Europe, and most of the

<sup>4</sup> J. Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom* (London 1951), pp. 59f. Translation of *Présence au monde moderne* (Geneva 1948).

material aids used by a modern missionary simply did not exist. And there were certainly things that our Lord did; he healed the sick, he taught people about God's kingship and its practical implications, and he drew a few men into a whole-hearted loyalty to himself and his kingdom. Yet Ellul is right that Jesus showed little or nothing of the obsession with gadgets and other material possessions, the "action for action's sake", and the striving towards material accomplishments, that are so characteristic of the modern world. What mattered to him was real living, which is living in the consciousness of the reality of God and in obedience to his will; "the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing" (John 5.19). True Christian action, and first and foremost the action of Jesus himself, is, according to Ellul, that suggested by the figures of Scripture, the action of "the corn which grows, the leaven at work within the bread, the light which banishes the darkness".<sup>5</sup> It was this kind of action which came spontaneously from the depths of Jesus' being.

It is in the light of this detachment from material means and programmes that we must see Jesus' failure to take any direct part in the political or economic or international activities, in which some of his most earnest followers are to-day deeply involved. Of course, it can be pointed out that a Galilean carpenter turned preacher was in no position to take any part in such activities, even if he had wanted to do so in the highly organized and centralized Roman Empire. Yet there was more in Jesus' abstention than lack of opportunity. On one recorded occasion when a concrete question of economic justice was put to him, he turned it aside with the answer, "Man, who made me a judge or divider over you?" (Luke 12.13,14). To the existing political, social, and economic order, Jesus seems to have showed the same attitude of "passive conservatism" that he showed to the religious customs of the Jews. Barth remarks: "Rather curiously, Jesus accepts and allows many things which we imagine he ought to have attacked and set aside both in principle and practice."<sup>6</sup> Instead of condemning usury he told stories

<sup>5</sup> J. Ellul, op. cit., pp. 93f.

<sup>6</sup> K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, E.T., Vol. IV, p. 173f.

which seemed to encourage the taking of interest (Matt. 25. 14-30); instead of condemning slavery, he spoke favourably of slaves who showed loyalty in the service of their master (Luke 12.35-40); instead of condemning forced labour, he told the Palestinian peasant who was compelled to carry a Roman official's baggage for a mile to offer to take it two miles (Matt. 5.41). He answered a dishonest question about paying taxes to the hated Roman occupying power with an answer that could only mean that such tribute was to be paid—an answer that showed more logical common-sense than revolutionary idealism (Mark 12. 13-17). This conservatism was certainly not indifference to men's needs, but probably the outcome of more fundamental characteristics of Jesus. For one thing he was always more interested in persons than in movements; this is why the short Gospels are so full of his dealings with individuals, Zacchaeus, Bartimaeus, Mary, Martha, and the rest. Again he knew that there were no easy ready-made solutions to the political and social problems of his own or any other time.

What Jesus did was to utter a saying—one might call it a principle if principles were not so often abstract—which challenged the hearer to apply it to the particular circumstances of his own problem not superficially but in depth. "Render unto God the things that are God's" was not a pious addition to a counsel of political compliance; it gives men the principle which will secure them from a wrong acceptance of the established order. "Do not resist one who is evil" may have given an immediate and obvious direction to the peasant conscripted for forced labour, but it challenged Tolstoy and Gandhi to unexpected applications, and its challenge is still relevant to many of our modern problems. Again it may be that Jesus himself was so close to the mind and purpose of God, that he could intuitively discern the right action in any particular social situation without the elaborate moral reasoning in which most thinking men have to engage. He knew on one occasion that it was right to pay the temple tax, even although his reason told him that he was free to do otherwise (Matt. 17.24-7); he knew the right moment for resistance and the right moment for submission (Luke 22.36; Matt. 26.52). So his so-called "passive conservatism"

could be better described as a waiting for the right moment to take the right action. It may be also the case that he avoided too close an identification with any human institution or movement, because to do so might have cramped his freedom to do the will of God as he saw it at each moment.

Jesus' interest in persons was not limited to his own friends and disciples; it extended to those whom he apparently met by chance on the wayside, like the widow of Nain (Luke 7.11-17). In other men this interest might have degenerated into the fussy interference of the professional do-gooder, but it could never become that in Jesus both because of his distrust of action for action's sake, and because of the spontaneity and genuineness of his character in all his relationships with others. While there was certainly in Jesus a general benevolence of outlook which sought the good of all men, we must not think of his love for men as something entirely different from that natural liking of people which is part and parcel of all genuine human love. Too many theologians, dazzled by the mystery of divine love, have thought of the love of Jesus in a rather inhuman way; they forget how the Gospels record the particular love of Jesus for three members of a family in Bethany (John 11.5), an unnamed disciple (John 13.23), and a rich young man who asked him questions (Mark 10.21). General benevolence is not what impresses one about the love of Christ as it is glimpsed in the Gospels. His was the love that took a little child into the crook of his arm (for that is the indication of the Greek verb in Mark 9.37), that appreciated with humour the different traits of character in Martha and Mary, both of whom he loved (Luke 10.38-42), that was fascinated with the little publican so far forgetting his dignity as to climb a tree like a schoolboy (Luke 19.4), that even during the agony of the Cross thought of an earthly home for his mother (John 19.25-7), and a heavenly home for a kindly-spoken criminal (Luke 23.43). There was what we are tempted to call the human touch in Jesus' love for those with whom he came in contact, but it is really and truly the divine touch.

Some readers have felt that Jesus was prejudiced against the prosperous and the virtuous in favour of the weak and the sinful. He spoke out in plain terms about the dangers of being rich

(Mark 10.23-7), and the impossibility of being slaves to money and servants of God at the same time (Matt. 6.24), but this did not prevent him from looking with love on the young man with great possessions (Mark 10.21), or inviting himself to dine at the house of the leading tax-collector in Jericho, rich as his host appeared to be with ill-gotten gains (Luke 19.1-10). He had Pharisee friends who were kind enough to warn him of the dangerous interest that Herod Antipas was showing in him (Luke 13.31). Although he denounced the Pharisees generally in almost brutal language for their perversions of true religion, he accepted an invitation to dinner in the house of a somewhat discourteous and condescending Pharisee (Luke 7.36-50).

Nor was Jesus' plain language directed only against the Jewish establishment. It seems even more shocking to most of us that Jesus, like any common Jew, referred to Gentiles as dogs, and appeared unwilling to help a Gentile mother in her distress (Matt. 15.21-8); we are ignoring the fact that Jesus' apparently harsh words were just the stimulus needed to arouse this woman's outstanding faith, which our Lord went on to commend. About another Gentile, in this case a Roman centurion, Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such faith" (Matt. 8.10). These examples certainly suggest that Jesus' love for individual men and women did not prevent him from speaking to them with bluntness, directness, saltiness, and even down-right condemnation in a fashion that is not customary in the less sincere and more mealy-mouthed ways of modern etiquette among friends. It may be that the apostolic witnesses took special note of Jesus' friendship with the disreputable and unpopular, just because it was so unexpected. They had had plenty of experience of religious leaders who tried to keep friends with the authorities, but they found it infinitely surprising that Jesus should be the friend of publicans and sinners, and so this was what they truly emphasized in their accounts of him. They were right of course in demonstrating that Jesus was always ready to respond to human need—a need that is often more readily to be seen among the poor and sinful than among the rich and virtuous. In any case, as Jesus himself realized, it is impossible to give real help or love to those who think they have

no need of help and who will make no response to love. There are sufficient indications in the Gospel that whenever Jesus saw a flicker of response in the prosperous or the pious, like Jairus the synagogue ruler or the rich young man, he was ready to meet it with the look of interest, the challenging word, and the helping hand.

Christian theology, with the larger mystery of the Incarnation in mind, has tried to express Jesus' concern and compassion for his fellow-men in terms of self-identification, particularly of his identifying himself with sinners. Matthew interrupts his narratives of the healing ministry with the remark, "This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah, 'He took our infirmities and bore our diseases'" (Matt. 8.17). It almost looks as if Matthew felt that there was something inadequate in merely telling about miracles of healing; Jesus himself bore people's troubles as well as cured them. He fulfilled all righteousness by identifying himself with the crowd of penitent sinners when he accepted John's baptism (Matt. 3.15). The greater part of his earthly life seems to have been spent in the home of a village artisan in Nazareth, which was then such an obscure Galilean village that there is no mention of it in contemporary literature either Jewish or Pagan; it was such an ordinary home and Jesus lived such an ordinary life there that the four Gospel writers say almost nothing about it. Even when he was conscious that his Heavenly Father could and would do through him things that we regard as supernatural, he refused to accept for his own advantage things that other men could not have, whether it was bread made from stones that would have satisfied his hunger after a forty days' fast (Matt. 4.2-4) or legions of angels to resist the forces that arrested him (Matt. 26.53). (Jesus, of course, had other and stronger reasons for refusing these things.) He suffered the final indignity of being condemned as a Zealot anarchist, being so literally "numbered with the transgressors" that he shared the fate of two common brigands. It was a story in many respects so very ordinary that it finds scarcely any contemporary mention in either Jewish or Classical literature. What Jesus did not share were certain of the common alleviations of our human lot—a home of his own (Matt. 8.20), the understanding of a

familly circle (Mark 3.21, 31-5), the comfort and security of possesssions, or the joys of wife and children. In our emphasis on the way in which Jesus identified himself with his fellow-men, we are very apt to think of it as the playing of a role, a con-sciently acted display of divine condescension. The temptations in the desert, presented though they may be in highly figurative language, and the clearly expressed longing in his prayer in Gethsemane to avoid the agony of the Cross should make it clear that Jesus lived his earthly life not as an out-thoroughly consider "humbled for a season", but as one "who in every respect has been tempted as we are".

Lord himself practised that denial of self which he so frequently demanded from his disciples (Mark 8.34; Matt. 10.38; 16.24; Luke 9.23; 14.27; cf. John 12.25). We are often tempted to deny even in his making of them, there is such a resolute mission, but, even in his claims that Jesus made for himself and his because of the claims that Jesus made for himself and his regarded the kingdom as coming through his own ministry.

When he started his mission in Galilee it was not himself he proclaimed whether he thought of himself as the Messiah at all, or Gospels, where Jesus apparently makes such egotistic claims as "I am the way, and the truth, and the life", we find teaching that seems deliberately contrived to show how Jesus attributed all given to him by God (John 5.22); the miraculous signs that he performed are the works of God (John 5.17, 19); "the Son can do nothing of his own accord." This denial of self and ignoring of his own interests, based on complete surrender to his Father's will, are seen in the ways in which he identified himself with men, his concern for others in need (Luke 23.27-8), his refusal of earthly honours and even human praise (Mark 10.18), and above all the self-effacement and lack of resentment with which he faced his trials and crucifixion—something that made a very

deep impression on St Peter, to judge from the Epistle that bears his name (1 Pet. 2.23, etc.). Christian theology has seen in our Lord's self-denial during his earthly life the outcome and expression of that supreme act of self-denial in which the Second Person of the Godhead "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant" (Phil. 2.6,7). It is significant that St Paul uses the self-emptying of Christ in the Incarnation, rather than any incident of his earthly ministry, as providing an example to Christians, who needed to be encouraged to give a generous collection (2 Cor. 8.9) or to show a Christian spirit in congregational bickerings (Phil. 2.1-6). The denial of self is certainly something common to the Jesus of history and the Christ of the apostolic proclamation.

Theologians came later to talk of the two natures of Christ, and one reason for our present-day revolt against this traditional concept is that anything which even by mere linguistic expression appears to deny the integrity of the personality of Jesus seems to us contrary to the portrait given in the Gospels and indeed blasphemous. We must beware of using language about Jesus with the schizophrenic implication that he at times acted as an ordinary human being and at times as Very God of Very God. It is here that the concept of depth, which theologians to-day are borrowing from the psychoanalysts and the existentialist philosophers may provide a useful analogy for the simple student of the New Testament. What Jesus did and said were certainly the works and words of a real human being, one about whom historians can tell tales and whose actions psychologists can try to explain. Yet the more deeply and comprehendingly we know these words and works, the more they are seen to be the words and works of God himself. The more seriously or (to use the current jargon) the more existentially we encounter Jesus the man, with the greater conviction do we become aware that the Eternal God is confronting us. We do not claim for a moment that this is something that can be established by logical argument; no syllogism with Jesus' humanity for a premiss will ever entail the conclusion that Jesus is God. This knowledge comes to us rather "in the flash of a trembling glance" just as the realization

that Jesus was the Messiah may have come to St Peter on that day at Caesarea Philippi; "Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 16.17). Once we have attained to this insight, even what we should be inclined to call the most human and ordinary actions of Jesus become irradiated with his divinity. It was thus that John saw the washing of the disciples' feet, something that might have easily been regarded as a kindly act of human courtesy and nothing more. "Jesus, knowing the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God, and was going to God... poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet" (John 13.3-5). We shall consider later how much this action can mean, when we see it, as John did, in its divine setting.<sup>7</sup> Even those features of the life of Jesus, which at first sight seem most tragically human—his being misunderstood by his own family, his being abandoned by his followers at the hour of crisis, his being betrayed to the Romans by leaders who shared his own religious heritage—are really, as Barth points out, parts of "the strange destiny which falls on God in his people and the world—to be the One who is ignored and forgotten and despised and discounted by men".<sup>8</sup> When Jesus might be regarded by historian or psychologist as suffering his most human experiences, he is in reality most divine, and, as we shall see later, most of all so, when he hung on a Cross.

<sup>7</sup> See pages 79f.

<sup>8</sup> K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, E.T., Vol. IV, p. 167.

## 4

*“With Authority”*

THOSE who try to give a completely human picture of Jesus of Nazareth are at once challenged by the emphasis laid by the Gospels on Jesus' power and authority. He taught with authority (Mark 1.21); he drove out evil spirits with authority (Mark 1.27); he had authority to forgive sins (Mark 2.10); he claimed authority to clear the temple courts (Mark 11.28,29); and he had the power to give something of his own authority to his disciples (Mark 6.7). In John, Jesus is declared to have divine authority to make men children of God (1.12), to execute divine judgement (5.27), to lay down his own life and to recover it (10.18), and to give eternal life to his own people (17.2). Even those who do not accept the genuineness of the sayings of Jesus in John's Gospel, at least in their present form, must agree that it was the intention of John to portray Jesus as one having divine authority.

This was certainly not authority of the kind exercised by magistrates and schoolmasters, and maintained in the last resort by physical sanctions; even the whip of small cords in the temple courts, which only John mentions, was more probably a symbol of authority than an instrument of actual violence (John 2.15). So at first we are inclined to regard the authority of Jesus as the authority of consummate moral goodness, the kind of authority that a good man has because of his obvious integrity and nobility of character. It seems a pity that the adjective most commonly applied by theologians to Jesus in this connection is “sinless”, for this appears to give a very negative account of one who went about doing good, and whose whole life was free from morbid inhibitions and radiant with positive goodness.

The Gospel writers indicate that the sinlessness of Jesus was not something that they took for granted in the way that later Christians with their theological presuppositions are inclined to do. They saw that Jesus overcame his temptations "exactly as every man who does so has overcome temptation—by the constancy of the will".<sup>1</sup> They tell frankly of our Lord's special temptations both at the beginning of his ministry and again in the garden of Gethsemane at the end, and we must remember that the distinction between being innocently tempted and sinfully falling into temptation is often made less clearly by the ordinary man than by the moral philosopher. Jesus was certainly a notorious Sabbath-breaker in the eyes of the pious people of his time. Others of his actions could very easily be misinterpreted by the censoriously minded as sinful, such as his leaving of his parents as a twelve-year old boy in Jerusalem without telling them where he was going (Luke 2.43), his referring to Gentiles as dogs in typically Jewish fashion (Mark 7.27), his anger at other people's misunderstandings (Mark 3.5), the bitterness of his denunciations of the Pharisees (Matt. 23), and the threat of physical violence, which was suggested if not intended by the whip of small cords. In view of so many things about him that could easily be misunderstood and criticized, it is all the more striking that apparently the worst suggestion that his enemies could make about him, was that in order to do good in such a marvellous way he must be in league with the powers of evil that he was combating (Mark 3.22). When he was finally brought for trial, his Jewish accusers could find no really criminal or even moral charges to bring against him, and were driven to a charge of heresy amounting to blasphemy in the Jewish religious court and to one of sedition amounting to treason in the Roman secular court. Pilate, the Roman prefect, fully realized his innocence of any ordinary misdemeanour. While it is only in the Fourth Gospel that Jesus explicitly declares his own sinlessness by the question, "Which of you convicts me of sin?" (John 8.46), yet he implicitly makes this claim in all four Gospels by offering himself as a moral example, and that in spite of his will to deny himself. He gave himself as an example of meekness;

<sup>1</sup> W. Temple, *Christus Veritas* (London 1924), p. 147.

"Learn from me for I am gentle and lowly in heart" (Matt. 11.29). He gave himself as an example of self-denial; "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mark 8.34). He gave himself as an example of humble service; "If I then, your Lord and Teacher have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (John 13.14). He gave himself as an example of love; "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you" (John 13.34). The apostolic writers did not regard Jesus as a supernatural being for whom to sin was utterly inconceivable; rather they were at pains to make clear the plain fact of history that Jesus did not sin. For St Paul, he was one "who knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5.21); for the author of Hebrews, he was "one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning" (Heb. 4.15); for St Peter, he was one who "committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips" (1 Pet. 2.22); for St John, "in him there is no sin" (1 John 3.5). Both in the claims to be an example to others which Jesus himself made, and in the declarations of his complete freedom from sin that his disciples made as part of their Gospel, Jesus stands on an entirely different footing from the greatest of his followers, for they have been deeply conscious of their own sinfulness. The authority of such men also largely depends on their moral integrity, but this very integrity demands in them a humble recognition of their own failings and sins. In this respect the moral authority of Jesus is unique.

The Gospel writers contrast the authority of Jesus' teaching with that of the scribes, the official interpreters of the Old Testament; "They were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes" (Mark 1.22). The authority of a Jewish rabbi was derived from the letter of Scripture and the accepted exegesis of the Fathers; it was always a derived authority. Jesus certainly made use of the Old Testament as the scribes did; we have already seen how constitutive a part the teachings of the Old Testament play in determining the nature of his own mission. Yet he deals with the Old Testament with a masterly freedom, giving new depth to its teaching as he undoubtedly did when he found in the creation

stories an authority for life-long monogamy (Mark 10.6); giving a fresh interpretation and application to a familiar passage, as when he uses a phrase from their own cherished Torah, "I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" to refute the Sadducees' scepticism over an after-life (Mark 12.26); or even completely overturning a traditional doctrine, as when he declared all food clean in spite of Levitical prohibitions (Mark 7.19). It was not that Jesus set out deliberately to discredit or overthrow the religious heritage of the Jews. In paradoxical language he declared that he had come not to abolish the Law and the prophets but to fulfil them, and that "not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished" (Matt. 5.17-20). When Jesus said of himself: "The Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath," he was laying down a principle of far wider application. He comes to the Old Testament in general, and to the Law in particular, not as its servant in the fashion of a scribe, but as its master, one who with the authority of God the maker of the Law, has the power to reinterpret it and change it.

Both when Jesus teaches from the Old Testament and otherwise "the reality of God and the authority of his will are always directly present and are fulfilled in him".<sup>2</sup> Here, as elsewhere, the authority of Jesus is bound up with his complete dependence on his Father and his complete obedience to his Father's will. It is in the Fourth Gospel that this theme is constantly reiterated in Jesus' own teaching, but it is present in the crucial passage from Q<sup>3</sup> (Matt. 11.27; Luke 10.22): "All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son, except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." The direct declarations and commands given in much of the Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere throughout the Gospels are even more convincing evidence of Jesus' divine authority. They do not in many cases find their authority in the Old Testament or

<sup>2</sup> G. Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth*, E.T. (London 1960), p. 57. (See also pp. 95-100).

<sup>3</sup> Q is the source from which, according to modern scholars, Matthew and Luke derived such of their common material as is not found in Mark.

elsewhere, and often Jesus makes no reference in them to the will of his Father. Who other than Jesus could have said, when his teaching was wilfully misinterpreted, "Whoever speaks against the Holy Ghost will not be forgiven either in this age or in the age to come" (Matt. 12.32)? There was a most intriguing insight into the nature of the authority of Jesus in the speech of the Roman centurion who claimed to understand Jesus' power by saying, "Only say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go', and he goes, and to another, 'Come', and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this', and he does it" (Mat. 8.8,9). The Roman centurion realized that his own authority lay in his being under the authority of the Roman *imperium*, and so he saw that Jesus' authority was infinitely greater than his own, because Jesus was under the *imperium* of God.

One common characteristic of the rich variety of stories told about Jesus in the Gospels is the way in which Jesus appears as master in every situation. John the Baptist is unwilling to baptize him, but in a sentence he convinces John that this is what "to fulfil all righteousness" demands of him at the moment (Mat. 3.15). Temptations come to him in the solitude of the Judaean desert; he knows exactly where to turn to meet them, finding the appropriate word in the Old Testament Scriptures. When the Nazareth mob, incensed at his claims, try to throw him over a cliff, he is still in command of the situation; "passing through the midst of them" he goes on his way (Luke 4.29,30). When Jesus meets and loves a rich young man, who is completely sure of his own moral competence, Jesus deals with him with penetrating insight and direct authority: "You lack one thing; sell what you have and give to the poor" (Mark 10.17-23). This is not the kind of counsel that a modern pastor would dare to give to one of his fellows; it could be given by only one who knows what is in man, and sees what God demands in a particular situation. We see this same authority again in the way that Jesus deals with the request of the two sons of Zebedee and their ambitious mother (Matt. 20.20-8; Mark 10.35-45). Most people would have met such a request with indignation, as indeed the other disciples did, but Jesus quietly sets aside the question of

the desired places of eminence as something with which neither he nor they were directly concerned, and uses their request to present to them the challenge of his cup and his baptism. John has with great artistry shown how even at his arrest and trials, when, humanly speaking, there was no power left to him, Jesus is still the commanding figure, offering himself for arrest, demanding the freedom of his disciples, and forbidding violence (John 18.1-11). In describing Jesus' interviews with Pilate, John conveys the impression that not Jesus but Pilate is being tried, and that it is he and the whole imperial system which he represents that stands condemned before Jesus whose kingship consists in bearing witness to the truth. This is not the power of physical strength or material resources or even intellectual mastery; it is sheer spiritual power.

Stranger still is the authority with which Jesus made claims on other men. He called fishermen and tax-gatherers, men already involved in the world's business, to leave everything, apparently right at that very moment, and to follow him. He declared to the villages of Galilee, where for the most part his Gospel had not been accepted, that it would be more tolerable in the day of judgement for the proverbial seats of ancient vice than it would be for them (Luke 10.13-15). He demanded from his own disciples a love and loyalty greater than that given to parents or children (even although it might mean the breaking up of homes (Matt. 10.34-7)), and he had not a shadow of doubt that to accept him was equivalent to accepting God in heaven, just as to reject him was equivalent to rejecting God in heaven (Luke 10.16). It was no wonder that the pious people of the time felt that he was talking blasphemy; such claims would have certainly been blasphemous, unless they happened to be true. He even claimed the power to forgive sins, a power which those present saw to be the province of God alone (Mark 2.10). His very presence seemed to demand a decision; men were either following him with gladness or eyeing him with hostility, either shouting hosannas or calling for his crucifixion. The change from the one attitude to the other could be very rapid, as in his own village of Nazareth, where at one moment "all spoke well of him" and at another all "were filled with wrath" and attempting to

murder him<sup>4</sup> (Luke 4.16–30). Jesus himself made it clear that an attitude of neutrality to himself and his mission was impossible; “he that is not against you is for you” (Luke 9.50); “he who is not with me is against me” (Luke 11.23). I cannot believe that Studdert-Kennedy was right when he suggested that if Christ were to appear in our modern world, he would simply be ignored:

When Jesus came to Birmingham, they simply passed him by;  
They never touched a hair of him, they only let him die.<sup>5</sup>

This does very often happen to some of Jesus’ more anaemic witnesses in the modern world, but it would not happen to the Jesus of the Gospels. The authority that was in him would constrain men to make some kind of decision, even if in characteristic human fashion it were soon changed or forgotten.

So far the authority that we have been discussing might well have been the authority of a good and great man, raised perhaps to the *n*th degree, but still within the range of our human imagination, if not altogether of our comprehension. Even the sceptical would admit that Jesus had this authority to an unusual degree. E. V. Rieu, after translating the Four Gospels, wrote: “Superimposed on all my previous impressions is one of power, tremendous power, utterly controlled. A strong wind swept through Palestine; but if it rooted up the rotten tree, it did not crush the injured reed.”<sup>6</sup> Many, and this includes thinking believers, hold that it was just in authority of this kind, and in it only, that Jesus showed himself to be divine. Yet the impression given in the Gospels is that there was something otherworldly, numinous, or even, as we say in Scotland, “uncanny”, about the authority of Jesus. His own immediate relatives and friends thought him a little mad (Mark 3.21); this was probably not as derogatory an estimate as it would be in the modern world, for the insane were sometimes regarded as possessed by the divine

<sup>4</sup> We can believe, however, that the crowd, probably largely composed of Galilean pilgrims, which welcomed Jesus to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday was different from the mob, probably of the Jerusalem riff-raff, which demanded his death on Good Friday.

<sup>5</sup> From “Indifference” in his *Collected Poems*.

<sup>6</sup> E. V. Rieu, *The Four Gospels*, p. xxx.

afflatus rather than by evil spirits. The Gospel writers themselves seem to be thoroughly convinced that his authority was more than human. Even hostile people remarked that "powers were at work in him" (Mark 6.14), and Luke describes the reaction to a miracle with the striking phrase: "All were astonished at the majesty of God" (Luke 9.43). A rich variety of Greek verbs is used in the Gospels to express the reactions of people to Jesus and what he did, varying from those expressing simple surprise or admiration to those expressing the kind of consternation or even of sheer terror that would be felt only in the presence of the supernatural.<sup>7</sup> The stronger of these verbs do occur most frequently in connection with things that would be commonly regarded as miraculous, but they do also occur occasionally in a non-miraculous context. When the disciples saw Jesus striding ahead with his face set to go to Jerusalem, "they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid" (Mark 10.32). The same kind of consternation was caused by Jesus' teaching as was caused by his miracles (Mark 6.2; 7.37), and in several cases the reaction of people to Jesus is most tellingly described with the simple verb "to be afraid" (Mark 4.41; 5.15, etc.).

When we of the twentieth century read of such supernatural events in the Gospel narratives as the stranger of the miracles, the voices that Jesus heard from heaven, or the appearances at the Transfiguration and Resurrection, our natural reaction is to feel that such things could not possibly have happened at least in the way that is suggested by the Gospel stories. There was, I believe, no such reaction in the minds of those who first passed on the Gospel tradition, and in my own missionary experience in the Punjab I scarcely ever found such a reaction to the Gospel miracle-stories among either primitive or relatively educated people. Everyone knew that such things, however unusual, astounding, and hair-raising, did sometimes happen. It follows that the Gospel witnesses did not feel the intellectual jerk that we do in passing from a purely human authority to one of the

<sup>7</sup> θαυμάζειν—wonder, marvel, admire, be astonished; θαυμεῖσθαι—be astounded, be amazed; ἐκθαυμεῖσθαι—be amazed, be alarmed; ἐκπλήσσεσθαι—be amazed, be overwhelmed (with fright); φοβεῖσθαι—be afraid, be frightened.

kind that we would say needed investigation by the Society for Psychical Research. They felt the same kind of consternation when they heard of Jesus walking grimly ahead on the road to Jerusalem, or making the astounding assertion that it was almost impossible for rich people to get into the kingdom of God, as they did when they heard of him exorcizing a demon or contriving a remarkable catch of fish or sharing a divine splendour after the Transfiguration. On that occasion we are told that the crowd seeing him were greatly amazed, although we are not told the reason why (Mark 9.15). In the first chapter of Mark, the same Greek word, meaning "authority",<sup>8</sup> is used to describe the power with which Jesus taught and his power to cast out evil spirits; in the next chapter it is used for his power to forgive sins. The Gospels here give a truer impression than many modern "lives" of Jesus. For we should be wrong to think of the life of Jesus as an ordinary human life, interrupted here and there by supernatural incidents of an entirely different order from the rest of his life. We must rather think of his life as pervaded throughout by the presence and power of God, as we may believe that every human life should be. The outcome of this divine presence was certainly at times unusual, just because he had a sensitivity to God's presence and love which was unique. He did things that none of the rest of us can do, things which he himself, according to John, spoke of as the works of God. The New Testament clearly indicates that he expected his disciples to do the same kind of works through his power (Mark 6.7-13), and that the early apostles continued doing miracles of this kind after the Resurrection (e.g. Acts 3.1-16). Luke makes it perfectly clear in St Peter's sermon in Acts 3 that such miracles were performed not by the apostles' own "power or piety" but by the name of Jesus and "faith in his name". Jesus was really and truly man as he did these miracles, so much so that we are sometimes inclined to think that the sole secret of his miraculous powers was his complete and enlightened obedience to the will of his Father—an obedience that should be the characteristic of every ordinary man in his attitude to God. Yet John and the other New Testament writers do suggest that there was some-

<sup>8</sup> ἐξουσία.

thing unique in the relationship of Jesus to God; it is because of its uniqueness that we cannot explain it by analogies from our own experience; even the analogy of father and son is sadly inadequate. Is it possible that the opinion of the Hindu sages and other pantheists, that if one digs down deep enough in any human personality one finds God, was literal fact only in the case of one historical person, Jesus of Nazareth? These are, however, questions for the philosopher of religion rather than for one trying to give a historical portrait of Jesus.

Most of the modern biographers of Jesus acknowledge, often with somewhat grudging reservations, that Jesus performed miracles. Even Renan the sceptic declared that Jesus "became a thaumaturgus late in life and against his inclination",<sup>9</sup> although he said elsewhere, "If ever the worship of Jesus loses its hold upon mankind, it will be precisely on account of those (miraculous) acts which originally inspired belief in him".<sup>10</sup> The miracles have certainly become obstacles to faith for many scientifically-minded people in the modern world. Renan, however, held that "miracles could not form part of a scientific history",<sup>11</sup> and so apparently concluded that what appear to be miracles in the Gospels are basically conjuring tricks of a type not unknown in other ancient religions. Is it conceivable that he who denounced hypocrisy in its most subtle forms in the Pharisees should himself for religious reasons have become a charlatan in later life? T. R. Glover says rather lukewarmly that "there is little reasonable ground for doubting that Jesus healed diseases. Of course we cannot definitely pronounce upon any individual case reported; the diagnosis might be too hasty and the trouble other than was supposed, but it is well known that such healings do occur, and that they occurred in Jesus' ministry we can well believe".<sup>12</sup> Thereupon Glover passes on to what he calls "the crowning feature of his work"—the "good news for the poor"—and we hear no more of miracles. One cannot but contrast this minute space given to the miracles in Glover's *The Jesus of History* with the large place they occupy in all the four Gospels. Even Bultmann the arch-demystologizer admits that "there can

<sup>9</sup> E. Renan, *The Life of Jesus*, E.T., p. 193.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 189.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 29.

<sup>12</sup> T. R. Glover, *The Jesus of History*, p. 126.

be no doubt that Jesus did the kind of deeds which were miracles to his own mind and to the minds of his contemporaries, that is deeds which were attributed to a supernatural, divine cause; undoubtedly he healed the sick and cast out demons".<sup>13</sup> Jesus was evidently an exorcist as well as a prophet and a rabbi. It is a measure of the honesty of these three writers, and two of them were professional historians, that they admit that some of the miracles of Jesus actually happened, although they make no large use of them, and indeed find them rather incongruent elements in their own portraits of Jesus. We must certainly give due weight to the possibilities that in the tradition miraculous elements were exaggerated and that interpretations of events were confused with the events themselves. It has frequently been remarked that the miracles in our latest Gospel, that of John, are, by and large, more stupendous miracles than those of the other Gospels; Lazarus had been dead for four days, the blind man healed in Jerusalem had been blind from his birth, and so on. Again, in Matthew, the finding of the coin in the fish's mouth may conceivably be no more than an over-literal interpretation of some saying of our Lord, akin to our description of someone as "born with a silver spoon in his mouth" (Matt. 17.24-7). The miraculous explanation of the destruction of the herd of swine after the healing of Legion (Mark 5.1-20) may be a pious application of the fallacy *post hoc ergo propter hoc*, although I am inclined to see in it an essential element in the cure; Legion had to be convinced at any cost that his demons were finally destroyed. Such cases are, however, exceptional and even what are probably the earliest written traditions (found in Q) include one of Jesus' most surprising miracles, the healing of the centurion's servant from a distance (Matt. 8.5-13; Luke 7.1-10) and Jesus' own statement to John's disciples about the variety of miracles he had performed (Matt. 11.5; Luke 7.22). The miracles are very definitely not mere optional extras or incidental parerga in the Gospels, but fundamental parts of the portrait of Jesus presented there. Take away all the miracle stories, and how

<sup>13</sup> D. R. Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word* (London 1935), p. 173. Translation of *Jesus* (Berlin 2nd Ed. 1934). Also *Theology of the New Testament*, Vol. I, E.T. (London 1952), p. 27.

very little is left of the record of events during Jesus' ministry. We should still have the incomparable teaching given in his sayings and the events of the last and most memorable week before his crucifixion, but we should have almost nothing of the story of the rest of his life.

In the Gospels themselves, the miracles of Jesus are never referred to as *terata*, the prodigies or wonders which were the common practice of the miracle-workers of other religions, with which Renan, following the lead of some Christian apologists, wrongly identified the miracles of Jesus. Jesus himself used this word only when predicting the activities of false prophets and false Christs (Matt. 24.24; Mark 13.22) and in a deprecatory reference in his challenge to the faith of a hesitating officer: "Unless you see signs and wonders (*terata*) you will not believe" (John 4.48). If this aspect of the miracles had been the essential one, it would certainly have received the same emphasis in the New Testament Gospels as it did in the apocryphal gospels of the second century. It was this type of miracle that Jesus was tempted to perform when the thought of making stones into loaves or of throwing himself down from a pinnacle of the temple came into his mind in the wilderness of Judaea. It was probably miracles of this conjuring-display type that his enemies demanded from him as signs from heaven (a request that Mark with fine irony records immediately after the Feeding of the Four Thousand (Mark 8.11,12)), and which his own brothers wanted Jesus to exhibit during the Feast of Tabernacles at Jerusalem (John 7.3,4). Renan was undoubtedly right that the tendency which still exists in the Church to use the miracles in this way can only lead to the Christian Faith losing its hold on thinking people.

In the first three Gospels, the miracles are generally referred to as *dynamēis*—powers or works of power. Whatever the sceptically-minded may say about the miracle stories in the Gospels, they stand in the record as witnesses to that impression of authority which Jesus made on those with whom he came in contact, and which is the special subject of this chapter. As we have suggested, it was not the kind of power that depends on worldly position or physical force or wealth or technical skill,

for Jesus actually had none of these things; his silence about his messiahship and his refusal to be made an earthly king are strong indications that he was determined not to rely on such things even if they were granted to him by God. People were conscious, as we have seen, of the power of his words, but the miracle narratives demonstrate that his deeds matched his words. This impression of power in action is conspicuously lacking in many modern accounts of Jesus, and indeed it is difficult to think of any other way of conveying it than that used by the writers of the Gospels—namely, the recording of Jesus' miracles. John the Baptist, who had thought of the Coming One as a king—sovereign in his condemnation and destruction of evil—saw no such kingly power in a Jesus who went about the villages of Galilee teaching and doing good in what we would call a very humble way of life. So he sent some of his followers to question Jesus, "Are you the Coming One?" Jesus' answer was, "Go tell John what you have seen and heard; the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them" (Luke 7.18–23). It is characteristic of Jesus' own attitude and that of the Gospel writers that the preaching of the good news should find a place among the works of power. At the same time the fact that we modern people would never think of including preaching among the Gospel miracles may indicate how far we misconceive their true nature and purpose.

Equally significant is John's term for miracle—*semeion* or sign. The Greek *semeion*, like our English "sign", is in most Hellenistic literature rather a vague word. Even in the other Gospels it is used for the sign that is a mere display of wonder-working, the kind of portent that an "evil and adulterous generation" have as their quest (Matt. 12.39). Yet there is good reason to think that in John this word has a more exact meaning as the equivalent of the Old Testament Hebrew word *oth* which connotes a pledge as well as a picture. *Oth* is the word used for one of the strange, symbolic acts of the prophets, like Ezekiel's representation of the impending destruction of Jerusalem by means of a brick and an iron plate (Ezek. 4.1–3). Such an *oth* not only represented something far more momentous than the actual materials that

the prophet was manipulating; it was a guarantee and pledge that this something would actually happen. The most obvious example of a Gospel miracle of this kind is the withering of the barren fig tree as it is recorded in Mark 11.12-14; 20-3. At first sight this might appear to be rather an unwarranted display of magical power, arising out of petulant impatience, but it is seen to be deeply significant and appropriate to its context, when it is regarded as a symbol and pledge of the fate of the barren fig tree of Judaism. It appears that Mark failed to see this and found in the incident only an illustration of the power of faith and prayer, something that is implied in, but is scarcely an essential part of, the original *oth*. John shows that he regards at least some of the miracles recorded in his Gospel in this fashion, by including in, or appending to, the narratives teaching of Jesus on the spiritual realities to which the miracle points. The Feeding of the Five Thousand, for example, is not for him merely a wonderful work of compassion; it is a picture and pledge of Christ giving himself for the life and nourishment of the world—a fact of which the Church was to have later a frequently repeated *oth* in the regular observance of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

In this promise of greater things, both present and future, the miracle stories contribute something quite fundamental to our understanding of the Gospel portrait of Jesus and in particular the mysterious nature of his authority. All his actions, and indeed his words, hold within them far more significance and promise than a superficial reading of the Gospels might suggest. The raising of Lazarus was not merely the restoration of one whom Jesus loved dearly to his family and friends; it was an anticipation of the more significant miracle of Easter day, when Jesus himself rose from the dead, and a sign and pledge that the resurrection of all whom Jesus loves (as he loved Lazarus) is not merely a pious, sentimental hope but a tremendous reality. Martha, who was quite ready to accept the doctrine of a resurrection on a distant last day as a belief of conventional piety, discovered that her brother was really alive there and then. In similar fashion a saying of Jesus like, "Do not resist one who is evil", may have appeared to its original hearers to be merely a counsel of prudence to the peasant forced by a Roman soldier to carry his

baggage or the like not to stand up to his aggressor; but actually it enshrines a truth which still haunts the minds of those who think seriously on the treatment of criminals, or right industrial relations, or the settlement of international disputes, and will continue to do so, revealing more and more the Christian solution of these problems. The author of John helps us to realize the wider implications and promise of much that Jesus did and said (as the discourses following some of the signs indicate) but a great deal of our devotional study of the Gospels has still for its aim the discovery of this deeper significance in the sayings and incidents found in them. Some scholars hold that this discovery was made by the early Church, including the author of John, round about the time that the Gospels were being written; the Gospel traditions "retain a concrete story about Jesus, but expand its horizon until the universal saving significance of the heavenly Lord becomes visible in the earthly Jesus".<sup>14</sup> Our contention is that this expansion was implicit in the words and works of Jesus himself, and that it was he himself who began the work of unfolding these implications, as John suggests. The apostolic witnesses certainly continued this work in both Gospel and Epistle, and it is still being carried on by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers. We must never think of this work as mere subjective interpretation of Gospel history; the larger promise was objectively present in the words and incidents themselves, like the life in the mustard seed or the yeast in the baker's dough.

The relative neglect of the miracles by liberal historians had probably behind it this conviction among others—that the Jesus of the Gospels is sufficient to meet all our religious needs and aspirations without his having performed miracles. If that were the case, it is very strange that those scholars to-day who are most ready to deny the historicity of many of the miracles are at the same time those who are convinced that the form and content of the Gospel narratives were largely determined by the needs of the early Church. If the early proclamation of the good news of salvation had no need of a Saviour who worked miracles, how came it to be that the Gospel writers included so many

<sup>14</sup> James M. Robinson, *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus*, Studies in Biblical Theology No. 25 (London 1959), p. 95.

miracle stories? It may be that these writers, like our Lord himself, saw human need in wider and more concrete terms than the theologians' rather abstract use of the term "salvation" would suggest. In being saved from their sins, men need to be saved from sickness and suffering, hunger and fear, guilt obsessions and insanity, and finally from death itself. Secularist existentialists to-day emphasize the challenge of death; "there is agreement between Heidegger and the Bible in the call to face death squarely as an issue touching my individual existence".<sup>15</sup> In facing that issue in depth, we may reach W. H. Auden's conviction,

Nothing can save us that is possible  
We who must die demand a miracle<sup>16</sup>

The Jesus of history meets us here both with the sign of the miraculous raising of Lazarus, and the more fundamental promise and pledge of his own miraculous resurrection. But the lesser miracles speak also to the realities of our human needs, such as hunger, danger, sickness of body, and derangement of mind. Jesus has still something to give us in these needs, as well as in the larger, spiritual needs, which they typify and in which they are actually constituent elements. For God, who so loved the world that he gave us the Jesus of history, still loves the world and the Word made flesh is still concerned with the physical aspects of our human nature.

<sup>15</sup> J. MacQuarrie, *An Existentialist Theology* (London 1955), ch. v, par. 6.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in J. M. Robinson, *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus*, p. 83.

## 5

*"A Teacher come from God"*

IF THE first disciples had been asked in our modern idiom, "What was Jesus' line?", the most frequent answer would probably have been that he was a teacher. The Greek word *didaskalos* which can only mean a teacher is used forty-four times of Jesus in the Gospels; the fact that in our English versions it is generally rendered by the word "master" gives it an ambiguity which is absent in the Greek original; there are other kinds of masters as well as schoolmasters. John indicates on two occasions (John 1.38; 20.16) that *didaskalos* represents an Aramaic word *Rabbi* or *Rabbouni*; it was certainly the word used in addressing religious teachers, but was also used for addressing others in authority, and so it is probably the original Aramaic word often rendered in the New Testament by the Greek *kyrios* or the English "lord". Yet the fact that the Gospel writers so often use the Greek word definitely meaning "teacher" shows that this was the way in which they naturally thought of Jesus. It must be remembered, however, that the relation between teacher and pupil was very different in the ancient world from what it is in the West to-day; it is more like the relation of a Hindu *guru* to his *chela*—a relation where the teacher not only gives instruction to his pupil, but lives in close intimacy and affection with him, giving him a personal example of right living, conferring on him his own powers, and entrusting him with appropriate responsibilities. The pupil, or "disciple", as we would commonly call such a pupil, gives to his master a personal devotion and even menial service that would not be expected of pupils in the Western world.

While there can be no question of limiting the work of a

teacher (and least of all of Jesus) to the business of instruction, yet the Gospels do show a primary concern with what Jesus actually taught, and many of our modern scholars who deny the possibility of giving any historical account of the life of Jesus would admit that we have, perhaps at second or third hand, many genuine sayings of Jesus, which give us at least some insight into what Jesus taught. These sayings soon constituted the principal part of the moral and doctrinal teaching given in the early Church, and they are still the foundation of much of our Christian teaching and preaching. It is possible to use the sayings of a great teacher in two ways, either for the teaching they provide (and this would not greatly change if it were given by a different teacher), or as revealing the mind and personality of the teacher himself. Jesus said, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matt. 12.34), and this was supremely true of one as completely genuine as Jesus. In discussing this aspect of Jesus' teaching, and it is the one with which we are primarily concerned here, the way in which he taught is nearly as important as the matter he passed on.

To-day—and in this may lie one of the weaknesses of our modern education—we expect a teacher to be extremely precise and literal in his use of language, and we pounce on exaggerations and inconsistencies. If Jesus was sinless, and still more if Jesus was divine, everything he said, we argue, must be "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth", and we are faced with all kinds of theological dilemmas, when we find that this is not the case. In spite of Jesus' statements, the Pharisees did not swallow camels (Matt. 23.24); people, however critical and censorious, do not carry logs in their eyes (Matt. 7.3); and Jesus himself removed a good deal more from the traditional law of the Jews than dots and iota (Matt. 5.18). Of course even the most literally-minded reader of Scripture would agree so far, but point out that Jesus was using vivid figures of speech, as every good teacher should. But is it not possible, we may ask, that Jesus was using language of the same kind when he spoke of the unquenchable fires of hell (Mark 9.43), or of sin that could never be forgiven (Mark 3.29), or of husband and wife being one (Mark 10.8)? For, if we admit that the language here is

figurative to a similar degree to that in our earlier examples, the bottom is out of some perennial theological controversies! What is evident is that Jesus did not use language with the logical precision that theologians, living under the shadow of logical positivism, now demand; indeed, as the positivists would be the first to admit, he was talking about things with which ordinary literal language is quite incapable of dealing. So he was not afraid of hyperbole and paradox and other figures of speech, which were and still are the common tools of the Oriental teacher, however "untrue" they may appear to the literally-minded. Jesus used language with the same masterful freedom that he showed in his use of Old Testament tradition or of Jewish custom. He used it with the rich allusiveness of a poet, recalling its Old Testament nuances, but giving words a new meaning in the context in which he placed them. When Jesus spoke of the truth of himself and his witness (John 8.14; 14.6), he was certainly not thinking of the literal exactitude of the correspondence between his words and facts, as some of his more pedantic followers have done. He was rather thinking of his words as the genuine and spontaneous expression of what God was saying and doing through him; they reveal the real and ultimate truth, even if, in the course of doing so, they sometimes strain language to the point of distortion. Indeed much of what he had to teach could not be expressed in language, however figurative, and so he had to speak through his actions, particularly through miracle and sacrament.

It is clear that Jesus not only spoke, but also thought, in concrete pictures rather than abstractions. He did not say, as we might, that a man's character is revealed by his conduct; he said, "You will know them by their fruits" (Matt. 7.16). He did not speak of a prudential care in selecting a message suited to one's audience; he said, to the scandal of many, "Do not throw your pearls before swine" (Matt. 7.6). He did not lay down schematically the rights and duties of neighbours; he told the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10.29-37). It may be true that most of Jesus' fellow-Palestinians also thought pictorially and in terms of particular cases, and indeed most men, uncorrupted by academic disciplines, still think in this way. Yet we

need only read the Fourth Gospel and the Epistles of St Paul to see how naturally abstract language, with expressions like eternal life and grace and justification, creeps into even first-century thinking on spiritual things. The fact is that human thought may develop in two directions; it may move to the abstract thinking of the scientist and the philosopher and, notoriously, the theologian; or it may develop but retain its concrete pictorial quality in the myth-maker and poet. Jesus was certainly more of a thinker of the second kind; the short word-pictures of the proverb-makers, the parable stories familiar to the rabbis, and even the mythical language of the apocalyptic writers, appealed to him and were used by him.

While there is nothing contrived or academic in Jesus' allusions and figures of speech, yet they cover a wide range of experience, as might be expected in one who had been educated in the rich treasures of Old Testament literature and who had been brought up in Galilee, which was probably the most cosmopolitan part of first-century Palestine. We have already indicated how much he owed to the Old Testament both in his conception of his own mission and in his teaching. There are some definite references to contemporary events (e.g. Luke 13.1-5) and probably others which we now fail to see but which provided the common subjects of talk in the bazaars of Capernaum at the time. His metaphors extended to warfare (Luke 11.21; 14.31,32) and to building projects (Luke 14.28-30). Yet, as lovers of the Bible have constantly pointed out, by far the most of his figures and his stories come from the life of the Galilean countryside and villages that he had known both as boy and man. There are pictures of crops growing, of birds roosting, of shepherds losing sheep, of labourers working in vineyards, of women baking bread and losing coins, of houses being disturbed by guests late at night or by robbers breaking through the walls, and of many another familiar happening in the life of a Galilean village. Like every good teacher, Jesus took his illustrations from what he himself knew, and from what his audience knew, in the most natural way. In the kind of picture that he commonly used, Jesus differs greatly from his follower St Paul, who scarcely ever uses metaphors from country ways and country people.

In the first three Gospels, the teachings of Jesus are given in two principal forms: the brief, almost epigrammatic, saying, and the short story or parable. The short sayings have much in common with sayings found in the prophetic books, and particularly the Wisdom writings of the Old Testament, and also with the utterances of rabbis preserved in the Jewish tradition. In the original Aramaic in which Jesus presumably uttered them, many of these sayings were probably short couplets in a kind of verse with the same parallelism between the two halves of the couplet that we find in Old Testament poetry. "A sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit" (Matt. 7.18), is an example where the parallelism of the two halves of the sentence is still clear even in English. The use of this form by Jesus may have two special indications. It looks as if Jesus were deliberately putting his teaching into the same genre or class as that of the Old Testament prophets, men to whom God had given his own messages; his own sayings could be truly called the "word of the Lord", the expression with which so many of the prophetic oracles began. Again, there can be no doubt that the device of parallel couplets must have been a great aid to the memory. It may well be that Jesus made his disciples learn his teachings by heart; this was certainly the method used by Jewish rabbis later. But, even if he did not use this method, he was certainly giving his teachings in a form in which they would stick in his hearers' memories. We must not think of the teachings of Jesus as casual observations by the way; even when Jesus uttered them, the form in which he gave them suggests that he regarded them as words of revelation—"holy words" to be remembered. The fact that a saying was originally uttered with a particular situation in view does not take away from its lasting and universal significance. Many of the prophetic words of the Old Testament had been uttered with particular circumstances in view. Isaiah's oracle, "In quietness and in trust shall be your strength", was clearly intended in the first instance for citizens of Judaea, desperately anxious to get military help from Egypt (Isa. 30.15), but this does not prevent it from having been God's word of comfort and peace to distressed souls in all kinds of desperate circumstances right down the centuries. Similarly the

words of Jesus, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God" (Mark 10.14.A.V.), were originally said to welcome particular children, for whom their mothers desired Jesus' blessing, but they are also words of universal invitation rightly used at almost every celebration of infant baptism.

When Jesus taught in parables, he was again using a method of teaching practised by Jewish rabbis, although scarcely with the challenging power with which Jesus used it. During the past century scholars have abandoned the traditional view that the parables of Jesus were allegories, i.e. stories of which each earthly detail had a heavenly or spiritual meaning only to be discerned after careful examination or even interpretation by Jesus himself or one of his Spirit-filled servants. Modern scholars in opposition to this view make two valid points. First, Jesus told each of these stories to meet the circumstances of a particular situation; according to St Luke he told the story of the Lost Sheep when people complained of the bad company he was keeping (Luke 15.1,2); according to St Matthew he told it to encourage his disciples to pay special heed to the little ones of his flock, whom they were inclined to despise (Matt. 18.10-14). It is very likely that he did tell this same story often in different circumstances, although many scholars think that Matthew put it where he did, because of a situation in which little ones were neglected in his own time. Again, Jesus told each of his parables to drive home a particular point or to emphasize one single lesson; this in itself is a sound principle of pedagogy. The story of the Good Samaritan was told to answer the single question, "Who is my neighbour?", and for no other reason (Luke 10.29-37). From these two generally accepted positions, many expositors make what I believe to be a false deduction, namely that the purpose of a parable, like that of a story or illustration in a modern sermon, was to make a difficult point of doctrine clear with the help of an analogy from common experience. Jesus may have sometimes used parables in this way, as when he illustrates the relation of conduct to character by pointing out that "figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush" (Luke 6.44). But Jesus' purpose in using parables was

generally to challenge people, sometimes to action, but more often, in the first instance, to thinking the thing out for themselves—again a sound educational method. The interpretation of the parables is not as simple as many preachers would make it. The challenge of the parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard (Matt. 20.1–16) is made no easier to understand by the words at the end about the last being first and the first last, which some have taken to be its interpretation. Even such an apparently simple moral tale as the parable of the Good Samaritan had its challenge to thought and action. The lawyer, either for the sake of argument, or “to justify himself”, as Luke alleges, asked Jesus who the neighbour was whom he was required to love by the Old Testament precept, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself”. Jesus’ answer told him of one, and that unexpectedly from the despised race of the Samaritans, who proved himself a real neighbour by his actions. And the final thrust of Jesus, “Go and do likewise”, was telling a pious Jew to follow the example of a Samaritan! That must have made the lawyer think. While we cannot believe that Jesus ever told parables deliberately in order to prevent outsiders from understanding his message, as his words in Mark 4.10–12 at first sight suggest, we can very well believe that the real challenge of many of the parables was seen and responded to only by a few; those “outside” simply heard charming stories. This may be the fact, amply confirmed by experience, to which attention is being drawn in Mark 4.10–12, although the sayings here were more probably taken from some other context, where they had originally a wider and clearer meaning.

One of the dangers of paying attention to these two more common forms in which Jesus gave his teaching is that we suppose that he never used any other method of teaching, and so lacked a versatility that many of his followers have possessed. There is good reason to think that Jesus did sometimes teach in allegories, as John depicts him doing in the lessons on the Good Shepherd (ch. 10) and the True Vine (ch. 15). The parable of the Wicked Husbandmen (Mark 12.1–11), at least in its present form, appears to be clearly an allegory, in which the vineyard represents Israel (as it so often does in the Old Testament), the

servants the prophets, and the son Christ himself. The allegorical interpretations given of the parable of the Sower in the first three Gospels, and of the parable of the Tares given in Matthew, are the explanations that any ordinary hearer who has not been conditioned by the theories of modern scholars would naturally take from them. There may be other and good reasons for supposing that these interpretations were not given by Jesus himself, as the records allege, but the unproved assertion that Jesus never taught in allegories is not one of them.

It is likely that Jesus sometimes gave much longer discourses more comparable to our modern sermons. Luke's summary of what Jesus said in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4.16-30) at least suggests a consecutive argument, and the teaching on defilement in Mark 7 has the arrangement and material of a sermon. This need not mean a sermon of our modern fashion; both these examples suggest more interruption and argument than would happen in a church to-day. Again, John may be right in describing how Jesus gave discourses of a longer and more theological type when speaking to the learned men he met in Jerusalem and to his own immediate disciples in private. This does not contradict the view that John put the teachings of Jesus into his own characteristic ways of speech. Even the brief sayings of Jesus may well be the key sentences remembered from a longer discourse.

People remarked on how different Jesus' teaching was from that of the religious teachers of his time, particularly in the matter of authority which we have already considered. Mark's report is that he taught them as one who had authority and not as the scribes (Mark 1.22). John tells how the officers sent to arrest Jesus declared: "No man ever spoke like this man!" (John 7.46). The difference between Jesus and these other teachers did not depend on the methods he used, for they too used parables and epigrammatic sayings. The difference lay deeper and may have depended on two things. The one was the absolute genuineness of Jesus; everything that he said was a true revelation of what he really thought and felt. Nothing was ever said for the sake of argument, or with mental reservations, or simply for effect, and there was no discrepancy between word and action. The other

was what has been recently called the transparency of Jesus.<sup>1</sup> In most men who speak for God, self is an opaque barrier preventing the light of God's knowledge and presence from reaching the hearts of those who hear. Those of us who preach the word know how our own self-regard and hidden interests prevent us from truly communicating that word. It was just because Jesus had denied himself and forgotten himself that God could speak through him in a way that he has never spoken through any other. Here again it is in John's Gospel that we find this most clearly indicated in Jesus' own teaching. When Jesus said, "The words that I say to you, I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works" (John 14.10), he is declaring that what gives his teaching authority is that he has emptied himself of all self-regard in his speaking, so that God the Heavenly Father is free to speak directly through him.

<sup>1</sup> J. A. T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (London 1963), p. 73.

## 6

*The Last Things*

IT WAS Albert Schweitzer who, at the beginning of this century, recovered for Christian thinking the realization that Jesus shared, at least to some extent, in the apocalyptic expectations of the Jews of his own time. With many eccentricities and flights of human fancy these Jews looked forward to the sudden intervention of God's rule among men through the appearance of the expected Coming One "in the clouds of heaven"—an intervention that was to mean judgement as well as deliverance. We need not suppose that this expectation had a universally accepted orthodox form, any more than the expectation of our Lord's Second Coming has one single form among Christian believers to-day. Jesus frequently used the kind of language common among Jews with this kind of expectation; such familiar Gospel phrases as "the kingdom of God" and "the Son of man" were probably part of the vocabulary of Jewish apocalyptic teachers (although our evidence for this is very limited and often indirect), and these phrases retain their apocalyptic overtones on the lips of Jesus. We have scarcely enough material to enable us to distinguish with any certainty between what was merely accidental in Jesus' use of the apocalyptic language and imagery of his time, and the permanent truths he wished to convey through them. To-day those of us who reject completely the teachings of astrology still refer to people in our ordinary conversation and even in our scientific lectures on other subjects, as "jovial" or "lunatic" or "born under a lucky star", all more or less phrases that were once the technical language of astrology; it would be exceedingly difficult to cut out all such phrases from our vocabulary. Similarly it would have been impossible for Jesus or for

anyone else in first-century Palestine to talk of the great matters of ultimate concern like death and judgement and man's final destiny without using the language of the apocalyptic literature. Nor must we imagine that these apocalyptic writers themselves used this kind of language with the precision that literally-minded "fundamentalists" and even some Biblical theologians would like to give it to-day. The Oriental, as we have already seen, is more prone than the Western to use metaphorical language with imaginative abandon, and indeed it is still impossible even for the most prosaic to talk intelligently of the last things except in the language of mythology and poetry. Jesus did not share in our modern passion for demythologizing ! The difference in Jesus' use of apocalyptic language from that of his contemporaries was largely one of purpose. They tended to use it in order to determine in advance the various stages of the great drama in which God is working out his purpose, culminating in the end or final day of the Lord. They saw that drama largely in terms of their own national destiny, and presented detailed pictorial descriptions of its scenes as they had supposedly been revealed to ancient seers like Enoch and Ezra from the secret master-plan of God. Jesus' use of this kind of language was in order to "bring men face to face with a decision they must make, on which will depend their destiny at the appearance of the Son of man".<sup>1</sup> This challenge was urgent, because, as we shall see shortly, this "Son of man" was either at hand, or had already come, and was in some way identified with the person of Jesus himself. Jesus, when he talked of the last things, had to speak in terms of present fulfilment as well as of future promise, and this in itself made him different from the other apocalyptic teachers. At the same time he was more down to earth and practical than the apocalyptic visionaries of Judaism; "nor will they say, 'Lo, here it is' or 'There !' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you" (Luke 17.21).

One of the gains of our modern critical study of the Gospels is a humble realization that some of our Lord's sayings may not in their original context have actually meant what they now

<sup>1</sup> M. Goguel, *The Life of Jesus* (London 1933), p. 570. Translation of *La Vie de Jésus* (Paris 1932).

seem to mean at first sight to the unsophisticated reader, and that indeed it may not now be possible to discover their original significance at all. We probably have some of them recorded quite away from their original context (like the difficult saying about parables in Mark 4.11,12), and we know only in a very few cases the actual circumstances—what the Germans call the *Sitz im Leben*—in which a saying was uttered. When we are told this, as in the case of the parable of the Good Samaritan, it often throws a new light on what our Lord was driving at. All this appears to be peculiarly true of the more apocalyptic sayings of Jesus; for example, some of the sayings in the “little apocalypse” found in Mark 13 appear to be giving down-to-earth answers to the question the disciples had asked about the date of the destruction of the temple, but others of the sayings here, perhaps equally genuine but presumably misplaced in Mark 13, have something very different in view—the Second Coming of Christ or the end of the world. It follows that it is impossible for us now to give so much weight to the *prima facie* meaning of a single text as Schweitzer appears to have done in his *Quest of the Historical Jesus*. In the text in question, Matt. 10.23, Jesus apparently dates the expected coming of the Son of man during the preaching tour which the disciples were about to begin: “For truly I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel, before the Son of man comes.” If we take this saying in its present context and assume that it refers only to a brief preaching tour in Galilee (something that is not by any means self-evident in Matthew) then we have to admit with Schweitzer that our Lord’s hope was sadly disappointed (as human hopes often are), and that our Lord was to some extent in error in his apocalyptic expectations. There was no recorded event during that preaching tour either in our Lord’s own life or in the wider history of the world that could be reasonably described as the coming of the Son of man. Most of us do not announce our Lord’s apparently mistaken belief in our preaching, or give it the place in our thought that Schweitzer did, but we acquiesce in Schweitzer’s view, by ignoring our Lord’s apocalyptic sayings altogether. One thing we do know; the faith of the early Christians was not destroyed by the failure of the Son of man to come, at any rate

in accordance with the conventional picture that we have, and they probably had, of his coming. He did not so come either during that preaching tour or during the lifetime of his hearers (Mark 9.1). It may be that the apostolic witnesses realized that in its deepest sense Christ's predictions had been fulfilled in the Resurrection and in the coming of the Holy Spirit; Easter Day and Pentecost were assuredly days of the Son of man, of the kind of which Jewish visionaries had dreamed. It may be that they actually knew that Jesus had meant by these predictions something very different from what we in our ignorance imagine that he meant. In any case they appear to have believed that there was something still to be fulfilled of the promises that Jesus had made in this strange apocalyptic language, for Epistles as well as Gospels make it clear that Christians of the second generation still looked forward to an imminent Second Coming of their Lord.

For here we have one of the paradoxes of the Gospels: two statements made with the authority of our Lord himself, which apparently contradict each other. If we look at the story of Jesus from one angle, we are constrained to say without hesitation that the Son of man has come and that the new reign of God began in the first half-century of our era. Jesus himself said things that can only be interpreted in this way: "The Son of man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19.10); "For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10.45); "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence" (or "has been coming violently") (Matt. 11.12); "The kingdom of God is in the midst of you" (or "within you") (Luke 17.21). In these sayings it would be extremely artificial to attempt to make the tenses of the verbs used refer to the future, and there can be no doubt that Jesus is talking of the Son of man and the kingdom of God as present realities. At the same time there are sayings that tell of both the kingdom of God and the Son of man as coming in the future. Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "Thy kingdom come", as if it had not come already (Luke 11.2); at the Last Supper he said: "From now on, I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God

comes" (Luke 22.18). About the Son of man there are such predictions as "They will see the Son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory" (Mark 13.26), or "You will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of man comes" (Matt. 10.23).

Those who have tried to solve this paradox have for the most part tended either to make the coming of the kingdom in the life and ministry of Jesus the Son of man the real coming, and to regard any future coming as its secondary outcome (the "realized eschatology" of C. H. Dodd), or to regard the future coming, variously dated or undatable, as the real coming, of which the life and ministry of Jesus were an anticipation and foretaste (the "anticipated eschatology" of R. Otto). If we are to be faithful to the witness of the Christian tradition, we must give full weight to both comings, and an analogy from later Christian history may help us to do so. It is possible for a historian to regard a decisive figure in the development of Christian theology like St Augustine as coming at the end of an age, as the product and fulfilment of both sacred and secular thinking up to his time. Equally it is possible to regard Augustine with truth as the thinker whose work would reach its fruition only in the massive theology of Aquinas or even in the revolutionary doctrines of the reformers. Historians of thought could write true and helpful books on St Augustine from either angle. In similar although by no means identical fashion, it may be possible with equal propriety to regard our Lord Jesus Christ either as the fulfilment of Old Testament aspirations, in which case we shall speak of the kingdom of God and the Son of man as already having come in him, or as the One whose life on earth will be seen only in its true perspective when God "has put all things under his feet, and has made him the head over all things for the church" (Eph. 1.22). When speaking in this context, we shall pray with expectation for the kingdom to come and look forward with expectancy to the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven. Jesus is far too great to be viewed exclusively from a single direction.

There is another, and less frequently noticed, paradox in Jesus' thought for the future. Jesus certainly appears to have looked

forward to a glorious outcome of his ministry, however much his account of that outcome may be obscured for us by the apocalyptic language of his time. He used the familiar apocalyptic figure of the Messianic banquet both in some of his parables (Matt. 22.1-14; 25.1-13), and in his saying at the Last Supper about drinking wine in his Father's kingdom (Matt. 26.29), to indicate what a later writer called "the joy that was set before him" (Heb. 12.2). At the same time no one can doubt that in Jesus' teaching there was a sense of impending crisis and even tragedy. He spoke of the cup he had to drink and the baptism with which he had to be baptized to the two disciples who sought a promise of thrones of glory (Mark 10.35-40), and cup and baptism were recognized figures for suffering and sorrow. He said elsewhere: "I have a baptism to undergo, and how hampered I am until the ordeal is over" (Luke 12.50. N.E.B.). The reality of tragic anticipation is vividly indicated in Mark's account of the last journey to Jerusalem: "And they were on the road going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; and they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid" (Mark 10.32). Nor can anyone read the account of Gethsemane, with Jesus' agonized prayer, "Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22.42), without realizing the darkness into which Jesus was reluctant to go. This tragedy reached a climax beyond our comprehension in its expression in the cry from the Cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mark 15.34).

How can we reconcile the expectancy of a coming in glory with the sense of impending tragedy—the reality of Jesus' hope with the reality of his near-despair? If one or other had to be abandoned, I have little doubt that those critics would be right who see the predictions of our Lord's rising again as insertions made after the Resurrection to Jesus' predictions of gloom (Mark 8.31; 9.9; 9.31); we must on no account leave room for anything that would take away from the reality of the sufferings of Christ. Nor have we sufficient grounds for the view, suggested by Renan and Schweitzer, that the attitudes of hopeful expectancy and tragic foreboding must be assigned to different stages

of our Lord's ministry, and that there were idyllic days in Galilee when Jesus had rosy prospects of the kingdom coming through the preaching and healing work of himself and his disciples, followed by a time of disillusionment when he set his face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem to face a Cross. We shall see reason in our next chapter to believe that far earlier he had chosen the road that led to the Cross. In any case we do not have either a knowledge of the order of events in our Lord's ministry or indications of the circumstances in which particular sayings were uttered, to allow us to make such a division of the Gospel story.

We must have a large enough picture of the Jesus of history to find room in him for the elements both of joyous expectancy and of tragic foreboding. Here again an analogy may help, provided by the way in which these two elements rightly come together in our own Christian experience. A seriously-minded Christian is likely to face the mystery of death with a certain solemn awe, however confident he may be in the Christian hope that "to depart is to be with Christ, which is far better". The final day of judgement is still for the Christian Church "that day of wrath, that dreadful day" and at the same time the fulfilment of all the promises of God. It seems as if we may be wrong in our common view that Jesus' nearness to God implied an insight into divine things that freed his mind from paradox. He too, like us, saw the tragedy of human life as well as its unquenchable hope, and both tragedy and hope were overwhelmingly real, and it was only faith in his Father's love which allowed him (and can allow us) to see that the hope is more lasting than the tragedy. We can go still further and believe that, as John describes, our Lord saw the Cross with all its terror and tragedy as the prophetic sign and indeed the first step of his being "lifted up" into glory. The only way in which Jesus could convey this two-sided truth to his baffled hearers was by those paradoxical sayings which puzzle us still.

## 7

## *The Way of the Cross*

IN EACH of the Gospels, the story of the last week of our Lord's life occupies about a third of the whole narrative. The story of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection was by far the most important thing that the evangelists had to tell about the historical Jesus, and it has even been suggested that we should regard the earlier chapters of the Gospels as introductions leading up to the story of Christ's passion. This is hardly correct; the story of the life and teachings of Jesus would have at least provided us with a supreme moral example and the highest moral teaching that the world has known, even if it had not ended in the Cross and Resurrection. Yet it is true that it is in the light of the Cross that the Gospel writers tell their story, so much so that it is possible for a preacher to take almost any incident recorded in the Gospels, and with a little imagination but no incongruity, preach Christ crucified from it. In what befell Jesus on the Cross the evangelists find the real meaning of his life and teachings.

Jesus had to die; there is an undertone of inevitability in the Gospel record. Socrates' sophistical critics in Plato's *Republic* saw that "the just man will be scourged, racked, fettered, will have his eyes burnt out, and, at last, after suffering every kind of torture, will be crucified".<sup>1</sup> The Second Isaiah had an even truer insight about the Suffering Servant of Yahweh; "he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people" (*Isa.* 53.8). We have already seen that there is good reason to think that Jesus may have found in the Servant Songs of Isaiah the pattern of God's will for his own life and

<sup>1</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, II. 362A. English Translation by Davies and Vaughan (London 1892), p. 44.

ministry.<sup>2</sup> Even if that were not so, the Gospel narratives suggest that, at least from the start of his ministry, Jesus knew that his path in life would be one of suffering. Luke reports that the aged Simeon had warned the mother of Jesus, that because of her son's destiny a sword would pierce through her own soul (Luke 2.35). Matthew's account of Jesus' determination to be baptized in spite of the hesitation of John the Baptist, shows how Jesus deliberately identified himself with the sin-burdened people who sought a baptism of repentance (Matt. 3.14,15); Jesus must have known that he was choosing thus the hard way. The reality of the temptations of Jesus in the desert lay in the fact that they suggested ways of carrying out the task entrusted to him other and more pleasant than the way of suffering. After St Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus himself repeatedly predicted his impending sufferings to his disciples in such clear terms that many scholars consider them to be insertions made into the teachings of Jesus after the event. We cannot get rid of them as easily as that. The strange experience of the Transfiguration with the talk of an impending exodus (Luke 9.28-36), our Lord's face set steadfastly to go to Jerusalem (Luke 9.51), the allegorical tale of the Wicked Husbandmen which even Jesus' enemies saw to be referring to their own plots (Mark 12.1-12), the words used by Jesus at the anointing in Bethany (Mark 14.8), and the words of the institution of the Lord's Supper (Mark 14.22-5), all combine to make it clear that at this time our Lord was looking forward to a martyr's death, probably with an increasing clearness of anticipation. The whole narrative of Mark from Caesarea Philippi to Gethsemane would lose its principal motive, if Jesus did not then expect to die. Even more convincing than the explicit predictions recorded by Mark are the little asides throughout the Gospel which suggest, with no deliberate contrivance on the part of the author, that Jesus knew his destiny. Near the beginning of his Galilean ministry, if we can accept Mark's chronology, he spoke of the bridegroom being taken away (Mark 2.20). Mark tells of plans to destroy him (during his Galilean ministry) of which he must have been well aware (Mark 3.6), and friendly Pharisees warned him of the

<sup>2</sup> See p. 20.

plots of Herod Antipas (Luke 13.31). The cup and baptism of which he spoke to the two disciples seeking earthly thrones at least showed that he knew what lay before himself on his way to his kingdom (Mark 10.35-40). In John, there are not only plots to kill Jesus (John 5.18, etc.) and deliberate predictions of his death (John 2.19-21, etc.) all through the Gospel; even from the time of the Baptism, Jesus is known as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world", and that could only be by a sacrificial death (John 1.29). A famous picture depicts the shadow of the Cross as falling upon Jesus in the carpenter's shop at Nazareth, and it seems at least to be certain that from the time of his baptism, Jesus knew that the path of life for him was to be a *via dolorosa*. After St Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi, if not earlier, he saw with increasing clearness that this way led to the Roman punishment of crucifixion at the season of the next Passover, probably the Passover of A.D. 29. It was probably a human reluctance to face unpleasant facts on the part of the disciples rather than lack of outside evidence or definite warning from their master that prevented them from seeing this for themselves.

All this is true, and those who have known it have been inclined accordingly to picture Jesus as a figure of tragedy—"the man of sorrows" of Isaiah 53—one of those who live life on a minor key in a sad, resigned submission to the cruel asperities of fate. This is certainly not the picture of Jesus that we have in the Gospels. We must not think of his eating with tax-gatherers and sinners or even with Pharisees as the unwilling carrying-out of a painful missionary task, like that of a Victorian lady visiting the slums. That would have been the kind of forced, hypocritical religion which he condemned in the Pharisees. He associated with people we would call delinquents and spivs, because he was genuinely interested in them and wanted to get to know them better so that he could learn to like them and really help them. A man who visited sinners merely from a sense of duty in order to preach to them would not have been caricatured as one who came "eating and drinking . . . a glutton and a drunkard" (Matt. 11.19). Again, in his attitude to the sufferings of other people, there was nothing of that exhortation to patient endurance or

merely sentimental sympathy which are characteristic of the piously submissive, and are often thought of as the proper attitudes for the Christian sick-visitor. Jesus was, simply and without complication, out to fight against sickness, madness, premature death, and even ordinary human hunger, as evil things, in the fashion that a modern humanist might fight against them. He does not appear to have used his healing powers to produce an opportunity for direct evangelism, as a modern medical missionary might do, although he was always ready to give an appropriate word of warning—to “sin no more”, if that were the word needed (John 5.14), or of commendation and encouragement (Matt. 8.10), or even of practical common-sense advice, as when he told excited parents not to forget that a hungry child needed food (Mark 5.43). It is very revealing that almost the only occasions when Jesus is represented as showing signs of anger are occasions when people took one of the conventional attitudes to disease—that it must not be cured on the Sabbath (Mark 3.5), that it was not his will or presumably God’s will to cure it (Mark 1.41 in Western texts), that its curing was an occasion for self-advertisement (Matt. 9.30; Mark 1.43), or that the only possible reaction to death was one of uncontrolled grief (John 11.33,38). Jesus apparently could not tolerate such attitudes.

When the suffering was Jesus’ own, there is no reason to think that he took a different attitude. He was completely free of what we might call in our modern jargon the martyr-complex by which some religious people would appear to welcome suffering for suffering’s sake. We have seen how in the baptism and temptation stories, the temptation to avoid suffering was a genuine temptation, and this remained true of his temptations until the end of his life. “Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done”, was still his prayer in Gethsemane (Luke 22.42). Jesus may well have been more sensitive to pain and anguish of mind than most men are, for this has certainly been the case with other noble natures. Jesus never deluded himself with pious platitudes about the benefits of suffering and the like; his final suffering was to be one in which even the most sanctimonious find it hard to discover

any benefit—the sense of being deserted by God. His attitude to pain and suffering and death was that of the ordinary irreligious man; these things were to be fought against and normally avoided. Yet the avoidance of suffering, however desirable, was not for him the most important thing in life (as it is for many in our hedonistic age); the most important thing was to do the will of God, although that would certainly entail suffering.

For Jesus had no doubt that God's will for himself and for his followers was that they should deny themselves, and self-denial is for human beings a painful business. Religious men have practised self-denial for two reasons. They may deny themselves as a method of self-discipline in the pursuit of perfection, and in the history of religion this has been the way of Hindu ascetics in the forest and of Christians called to pursue perfection in the life of an enclosed monastery. Such self-denial may often be necessary for sinful followers of Christ in their pursuit of holiness, but, as far as we can see, it had no place in the life and purpose of Jesus, who did no sin. The danger of such self-denial is that it may degenerate into a pursuit of suffering for its own sake, which is certainly something completely contrary to the mind and example of Christ. The other way of self-denial is to be "a man for others"—to forget ourselves and even our sufferings in our love and service to others, and there can be little doubt that this is the kind of self-denial of which Jesus provides the supreme pattern. It is in this respect that the Cross is the ultimate expression of what went on throughout the earthly life of Jesus. We can see him giving himself for the sake of other people in almost every one of the stories told about him, whether it be that of a healing in which power went out of him (Mark 5.30), or that of an interview in which he made a costly challenge to a young man whom he loved at first sight (Mark 10.17–22), or that of a shocking disturbance to his teaching by little children and their demanding mothers (Mark 10.13–16), or that of his appreciation of a woman's costly gift in spite of the talk it aroused (John 12.1–8). Even during his supreme act of self-denial on the Cross, he was still "the man for others" in less world-shaking ways. He thought of the soldiers who were crucifying him and said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23.34). He thought

of the kindly-spoken brigand beside him, and promised him a home in Paradise (Luke 23.43). He thought of his mother in her bereavement and his beloved disciple in his loneliness and contrived to make an earthly home for them both (John 19.25-7). With a subtle artistry, Luke depicts in turn the ruler of the Jews, the soldiers on duty, and the querulous criminal as calling upon Jesus to save himself—the one thing that he could not and would not do in carrying out his task of saving others (Luke 23.35,37, 39).

The self-denial of Jesus' life and the greater self-denial of his death are linked by the incident of the washing of the disciples' feet, in which John obviously finds a very special significance. It was, of course, a good practical example of humble service for disciples who had very different ideas from Jesus' own as to what their service in the coming kingdom would be. The language with which John introduces the story indicates that for him it was an integral part of our Lord's passion. "Now", he begins, "before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (John 13.1). And then, "knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God, and was going to God", he began to wash his disciples' feet. To wash his master's feet was the work of a foreign but not of a Jewish slave, although the Jewish writings tells us that a wife would do it for love of her husband, but here it is a picture and promise of a greater humiliation still—a criminal's death on the Cross, which Jesus was to face for the love of his friends. Peter found it hard to accept such a humiliating service from the master he loved, and so he exclaimed: "You shall never wash my feet". But Peter was in need of a cleansing which would entail what Peter must have regarded as a still greater degradation of his master, for the price of his cleansing, and ours, was the death of Jesus on the Cross. This is why our Lord could say to Peter, "If I do not wash you, you have no part in me"—words which are only symbolically true of an outward foot-washing, but which are altogether true of the cleansing accomplished in the Atonement. The natural human pride and self-reliance of Peter had to be set aside before

he allowed Jesus to wash his feet, and to accept Christ's sacrifice for us on the Cross means the abandonment of all reliance on ourselves and our achievements. Both in the foot-washing and the crucifixion we see with a new clarity "the man for others", undertaking the lowliest and most despised forms of service, and yet making the most challenging of all demands—the demand to give up reliance on ourselves. The essence of the Cross, which appears fitfully and incidentally in so many of the Gospel incidents, is brought into focus in the foot-washing, as a preparation for the Crucifixion itself.

The charges, even the false charges, on which an innocent man is condemned, generally throw a certain light on the character and conduct of the man under trial, for there has to be some plausibility even in a false charge. The most definite charge made against Jesus was that he had threatened to destroy the temple, and put something of a different kind "not made with hands" in its place (Mark 14.58). The Gospel writers themselves give two facts from which these charges could be manufactured; Jesus had claimed authority to break up the temple market (Mark 11.15-18) and he had predicted the destruction of the temple itself (Mark 13.1-3). John connects these two incidents, and finds Jesus' authority for cleansing the temple court in his power to rebuild the destroyed temple within three days—the temple being for John a symbol of Christ's own body. Jesus' enemies appear to have had this measure of truth in their charges; however faithful Jesus himself was in his attendance at the temple festivals, and however much he used the temple courts for his teaching ministry, he presaged in his life and teaching a religion that had no place for the institution and ritual of the Jerusalem temple. Stephen was to declare this quite explicitly, and suffered a martyr's death for doing so; he too had his followers in St Paul and the author of Hebrews. Yet the beginning of it was in Jesus' own readiness to sacrifice the most cherished institution of his people—and one that he himself had loved—when it stood in the way of his heavenly Father's purpose of missionary expansion for his church.

In the court of Pilate, the charge was primarily one that had only been hinted at during the Jewish examination, namely that

Jesus claimed to be the king of the Jews, and so a potential danger to the Roman administration. Luke gives a full account of the charge in words that sound like the standard form of the charge made against Zealots: "We found this man perverting our nation, and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ a king" (Luke 23.2). As the writing on the cross shows, this was officially the charge on which Jesus was put to death. It is an accusation that seems ridiculous to us, and we are inclined to see in it simply a cock-and-bull story told to mislead the Roman prefect. Yet John's account of an earlier meeting of the Council (John 11.47-53) rings true; some of the religious leaders were genuinely concerned that, if Jesus' mission went on, the Romans might intervene, and the upshot would be the destruction of temple and nation. They may have heard that on one occasion a Galilean mob had actually attempted to make him a king by force, and he would appear to be as likely a person to lead a political revolt as some of the Zealot pretenders of the first century. This charge does bear witness to the fact that there was something regal about Jesus; he had the authority of a king. Pilate, according to John's account, seems to have been uncomfortably conscious of this during his private interviews with Jesus, although he was thoroughly convinced of Jesus' political innocence.

The third and most surprising charge—and the one that appears to have brought the members of the Jewish Sanhedrin to a unanimous verdict—was that Jesus blasphemously claimed to be the Son of God. This was not, as the words suggest, merely a claim to be the Jewish Messiah, for many of the Sanhedrin would be at most lukewarm in their opposition to any Messianic claimant; there was something fine, they would think, in even the most misguided Zealot who was ready to stand up against the Romans. His crime in the eyes of these leading Jews lay not in his claiming to be the Messiah, but in the kind of Messiah that he claimed to be. The words that finally aroused them to condemnation were those of his answer, "I am, and you will see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power". Here is the scandal of Jesus, both then and now. He will not allow himself to be simply a worthy Jewish rabbi, a great and good man, or

even a national deliverer. If he were merely one of these, the religious leaders of the Jews and the unbelieving world and the secular historians would know how to deal with him. But he claims to be, and his own followers know him to be, more than an ordinary man, however good and great. There is something beyond what is natural about him—a direct awareness of the presence and power of God within himself—that is disturbing to common-sense religion and might lead society anywhere. Those who secured the crucifixion of Jesus were out to put an end to that scandal; even Pilate, who believed that he was harmless, probably felt that he was safer dead than alive. How very wrong they were, for the outcome was that what had been to them merely a suspicion of the divine presence and power became an open challenge through the empty tomb and the appearances of the risen Lord.

*Alive for Evermore*

IT IS customary for a biographer to end his story with his hero's death, with perhaps an additional chapter to tell of his influence on later generations. In this fashion many modern "lives" of Jesus end with the story of the Crucifixion. Some believe that death was the end of the story with him, as it is with other human beings. Others hold that what the Gospels tell of what happened in the days following Good Friday are not materials of a kind with which biographers and historians can deal. They were, they allege, the subjective experiences of believers—the sceptic would call them hallucinations, the believer would call them visions—they are not objective facts for which evidence can be produced. Yet both the early chapters of Acts and some statements in Paul's letters show that the apostles regarded themselves almost first and foremost as witnesses of the Resurrection (Acts 1.22; 2.32; 1 Cor. 9.1; 15.8,9), and a witness, as commonly understood both by them and by us, is one who gives evidence of what he has seen with his bodily eyes and heard with his bodily ears. The fact that the tomb was found to be empty, which appears to have been one part of the apostolic testimony, is a fact to be accepted or rejected by the ordinary rules of evidence. The other part of that testimony, namely that the risen Lord appeared to his disciples, is admittedly somewhat different. It would undoubtedly be difficult for a judge or a scientific investigator to estimate the value of evidence which tells of a man appearing and disappearing in a room with closed doors (John 20.19,26; cf. Luke 24.31). Again the fact that there is no record in the Gospels of the risen Jesus appearing to anyone except believing disciples would strongly indicate to the impartial

investigator that the appearances were subjective experiences. On the other hand the writers of the Gospels clearly wish to give the impression that it was a thoroughly physical resurrection. So they tell that the risen Jesus ate with his disciples (Luke 24.43); that it was possible to touch his body (John 20.17,27); that he was human enough to be mistaken for a gardener (John 20.15); and that the wounds of the crucifixion had left their marks on him (Luke 24.40; John 20.27). Even if we were to ascribe all this to later developments in the tradition, it is a fact that St Paul himself seems to make a distinction between his experience on the Damascus road (1 Cor. 15.8) and other occasions when he had visions and revelations of the Lord (2 Cor. 12.1; cf. Acts 18.9), and to have regarded the former, but not the latter, as of the same order as the resurrection appearances to the earlier apostles. These experiences were unique, and there are no parallels by which we may try to elucidate their nature. So it would be wrong to label them as either subjective or objective, although they have certain of the characteristics of both these kinds of experience.

Whatever was the nature of the appearances, the apostolic witnesses had no doubt at all that the Jesus who appeared after the Resurrection was the same Jesus whose words and works are recorded in the earlier parts of the Gospels. It was true that his followers appeared to have had a little difficulty in recognizing him. Mary Magdalene, weeping as she was, mistook him for a gardener in the early morning light; the two disciples on the road to Emmaus failed to recognize him, in spite of their hearts burning within them (Luke 24.32); and the disciples in their boat on the lake of Galilee failed at first to recognize him standing on the shore, again possibly in the dim light of morning (John 21.4). We may guess that there was something indefinitely different about him. Yet the evidence is equally strong that, when they did recognize him, they did so because of familiar human things about him. Thomas was invited to look at the marks of the nails on his hands and the wound on his side (John 20.27); it was the Jesus who had died a criminal's death whom he saw alive again. The two disciples at Emmaus recognized him as he made the familiar and probably characteristic movements of breaking

bread, just as he had done at the Feeding of the Five Thousand (Mark 6.41) and at the Last Supper (Mark 14.22) and probably on many another occasion. John tells that the disciples at the lake of Galilee recognized him, after they had at his direction made a miraculous catch of fish, something which Luke tells had happened to them once before in almost the same circumstances during his earthly ministry (John 21.4-11; cf. Luke 5.1-7). It was to Peter who had been called at Caesarea Philippi to be the rock on which the Church was to be built, to whom Jesus entrusted after his resurrection the care of the sheep and lambs which are within the fold of the Church (John 21.15-17). The experiences that the disciples had of the risen Lord appear to have been for the most part actualized renewals of experiences that they had had of Jesus during his earthly life. They knew that Jesus was doing during the forty days after his resurrection and would always be doing things of the same kind as he had done during his life on earth. The deeds and words of Jesus were not merely things that had happened some time ago in Galilee or Judaea; they were still happening, and we should see in these post-resurrection incidents the sign and pledge that they would always happen.

We may have a key here to the kind of language that religious people use, even although it sounds nonsensical to the uninitiated. When Romanist theologians and others talk of the real presence of Christ in the sacrament or of a sacrifice being offered at each celebration, perhaps they are, however inadequately, trying to convey the truth that events which took place in the Upper Room in Jerusalem and on the Cross of Calvary in the spring of the year 29 or 30 are not merely being displayed in a ritual representation through the sacrament, and that they are not simply past events still exercising an influence on mankind in the way that many past events of history do. They are events which are still happening, still operative, in a strange way still present to those who come in faith to the sacrament. There are others, more often Protestants, who have said the same kind of thing about the preaching of the word, that the work of salvation, accomplished by Christ's death and resurrection in the first century, actually happens here and now when the word is truly

preached. What Jesus did and said are not matters of ancient history; he still speaks and acts effectively through the proclamation of his word. To put it in another way, when we Christians maintain that Jesus is alive and at work in the world to-day, we do not mean that he is alive and at work in the fashion that Socrates or Shakespeare may be said to be a living force and influence still. He is alive much more in the way that the present Prime Minister of Great Britain and the present President of the United States of America are alive and at work, although, of course, there is the difference that he is no longer visible to our ordinary senses. The events recorded after the Resurrection took place in the transition stage when outward signs were still needed as pledges that Jesus was really alive and active in the world, and would be so "even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28.20 A.V.).

There is a growing recognition among secular historians that their task is not merely to discover the causal relationships of events that happened long ago, but also to see what was unique and creative in individuals in the past and even to reveal what they have to say to us in our own particular situation. We suggested at the beginning of this book that the Gospels were neither histories nor biographies, and this would be entirely true if history consisted merely in the discovery of causal relationships among past events. But, if we see history in the more modern fashion, there are no other writings, historical or biographical, in which the principal character can be seen to be so completely relevant to our human situation in this as in every other generation. We have just suggested that one, but by no means the only, aspect of the resurrection appearances was that Jesus, and what he had said and done in the days of his earthly life, became alive and relevant for the first disciples in a new way, in the special circumstances of physical separation from their Lord and of missionary responsibility to bear witness to him, in which they found themselves soon after the first Easter. The Form Critics<sup>1</sup> of our own time, however wrong they may be in their intentional

<sup>1</sup> A group of scholars, including Bultmann, who attempt by a study of the forms of Gospel traditions to discover their history and to assess their reliability.

or unintentional depreciation of the historical value of the Gospel records, are right in their implication that the sayings and events of Jesus' ministry handed down in the tradition were present and relevant to the needs of the second-generation Christians at the time the Gospels were written. And so it has been with every generation since.

There are some people to whom Jesus comes in mystical experiences but they are few. There are people to whom Jesus comes as they respond with their whole being, existentially (as we now say), to the challenge of the preacher's *kerygma*, but, as was argued in our first chapter, this *kerygma* is not to be thought of as excluding what Jesus said and did during his ministry. Yet I venture to suggest that most of us who were born in Christian homes met Jesus first of all in the stories told in the Four Gospels, repeated to us by parents and teachers even before we could read the New Testament for ourselves, and the Jesus whom we thus met caught our imagination and won our affection. To begin with at any rate, what Jesus was and is, was far more important and meaningful for us than what he accomplished for us, although that too became later a part of our knowledge of him. Later, through prayer and sacrament, as well as through a deeper study of the Bible itself, we come to have a richer and in some ways a more direct experience of Jesus, but the fundamental part of this experience is still what we know of the Jesus of history. When we say in our creeds and formulas that Jesus was more than man, we are expressing among other things the truth that Jesus has the power and condescension to come out of the pages of history, and to speak to us personally and directly as no mere human being has ever done. His word to us is still, "Behold I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me"; "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 3.20; 22.20 A.V.).

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